

## The Recall Myth: Why Your Off Leash Dog Isn't Coming When Called And How To Fix It

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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Over the years, I've had students join our program and say, "Susan, I love everything you do. I love the shaping approach to dog training." Except I would never do that for my recall. Because it's just too important. And that's always got me scratching my head because for the last 30 years, it's exactly how I've trained every one of my dogs how to have an amazing recall.

So, I know it's not just possible for Susan Garrett and her dogs because in our Recallers program, we've had tens of thousands of people have the same success that I've had. In today's Shaped by Dog podcast episode, I'm going to share with you the steps that we all take to get those amazing recalls with our dogs without the use of pain or intimidation.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. It's crazy. We have over 300 Shaped by Dog episodes here. I just realized, I have never done one on how to get a great recall. The irony is I'm probably best known for a program that teaches people how to get a great recall.

And so, in this episode, I'm going to share with you why I believe people struggle to get a reliable recall and what you can do to get one. A recall is like anything else we shape. It comes down to three different parts of training.

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It is identifying what's valuable to your dog, transferring the value, and then you test that value. Very, very simple, and that should be the end of this episode, but it's not because there's a lot of people that just aren't getting that.

First of all, let's talk about why recalls might fail. I think the number one reason they fail is there's too many rehearsals of anti-recalls allowed as puppies grow up. Now, [you might have a rescue dog](#). You don't know what those rehearsals are, but that doesn't mean you can't have a great recall. I've taken in many rescue dogs that I've been able to rehabilitate and create a great recall.

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And so, what does a rehearsal of an undesired behavior look like? If you have a dog door and your dog can go outside, chase squirrels all day, [chase chipmunks](#), then when you're at the park, it's no wonder they want to chase dogs or bicycles or kids squealing.

So those rehearsals make it more difficult to get a great recall. Does it make it impossible? It makes it more difficult. I'm not going to say the word impossible, but I know it's not something I would ever do. When I get a puppy or a rescue dog, they go outside with me on leash for many, many reasons. But the main one is so they don't rehearse behaviors that I'm going to have to untrain in the future.

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So, the rehearsal of a dog, being able to [find reinforcement in the environment](#) on a routine basis is probably the number one thing that works against you when you're trying to create a reliable bombproof recall. Number two reason, I believe, goes back to the foundation that people put in to create that recall.



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Especially in the reinforcement-based dog training world where people like me don't want to have to resort to corrections to get the behavior we want, oftentimes the reinforcement is misused. People think 'If I get my dog to recall away from something, I have to have something they like better.' 'To get my dog to recall away from a child, I have to have a really exciting piece of food.'

And there will come a time when what the dog is attracted to in the environment is far more reinforcing or attractive than any piece of food you could ever come up with. So, relying on lures to create a recall, that's mistake number one.

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Mistake number two in the foundation is the false confidence that's created through tools. So, the main tools I believe are at risk at creating a sense of false security or false confidence in the handler in your recall, is a long line or [an electric collar](#).

So, an electric collar isn't something I know a lot about. It's not something that I've ever used. Maybe I should do a podcast episode on why that is.

But an electric collar, you have the ability to stop a dog in its tracks. You actually, depending on the size of the dog and the strength of the dog, have the ability to flip a dog with an electric collar. Let's not talk about that.

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But the truth is, why I think that creates false security is batteries fail. Electric collars, maybe you don't have your remote. Maybe your remote isn't fast enough. Maybe it's not in a location before the car comes to stop the dog in their tracks.

As fool proof as it may seem, it's still a tool with a lot of potential fallout and emotional damage done to the dog. But it's a tool. You don't want to rely on a tool.

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You want to rely on good dog training. Alright, long line, and I was taught that back in the late eighties, early nineties, your puppy always has to be in a long line, and you tell them, "Come" and pop and get them to chase you and give them reward when they come away.

What that does is gives you that false security that 'I'll just step on the line if my dog isn't doing what I want', which is unkind to the dog. But also, what happens when you miss stepping on the line, the line gets under your foot. If you don't have those tools to rely on, then they can never fail.

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I think the access to inappropriate reinforcement and the over-reliance on tools to teach a recall are the two biggest reasons why they fail. So, I'm here to tell you, even if you've made one of those two big mistakes in the past, if you follow what I'm going to share with you today, it will dramatically increase the probability that your dog will have a reliable recall in the future.

So, what I said off the top, I've mentioned this in so many podcast episodes, in particular [episode number 301](#), when we're trying to create a behavior, there are three areas we need to focus on.

Number one, identifying value for your dog. What does the dog find reinforcing? And on a scale of what? So, list all the treats or food that your dog might find reinforcing and rate them on a scale of one, not so reinforcing. 10, they're gaga over.



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You need to know, because you're never going to use low ones, but we're going to mix in the low ones because the higher value will help create value for the lower ones. More on that in a second.

What we want to do is use the higher value rewards when there's a mild or moderate level of distractions in the environment when we're working our dog. So, we need to know the food, the toys, the activity, and most importantly, what instinctively is a reinforcer to your dog. If you have a Beagle, you know what instinctively is so reinforcing to your dog, getting on the trail of an animal.

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If you have a dog that's got [high prey drive](#), chasing an animal, chasing something is highly reinforcing. So, food, toys, activities, and under activities, what instinctively is reinforcing to your dog? Those instinctive ones are the most important ones. Those are the ones we want to prevent your dog from getting access to rehearse them until we put them under a cue so that they can come through you.

That gets me to the second category, transferring the value. So, I talked about if you have low, high, and moderate value food, we want to use the moderate and high value food mixed up into like a party mix so that you pick one up in your training. Sometimes your dog's getting super high value, sometimes they're getting more moderate value.

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If there's something super exciting or something very difficult in your training, you will go for the higher value ones. Once you've got the moderates creeping up to be high, then you can bring in some lower value food rewards so that eventually you've transferred the value from the high value into any food rewards you give your dog.

I can give my dogs a pill as something that is a reinforcer because I've transferred the value just in that way. Now we're going to do the same thing with activities the dog likes by doing something called the [Premack Principle](#).

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I've talked about this in previous episodes. And what we're going to do is, if you're going to release your dog to do something they love, like going for a swim or chasing a ball, we're going to have them do a behavior first.

Sit at your side, touch your hand, do a spin, something that they do, and they realize that in order to get you to throw the ball or to get you to release them to the water that they have to listen to something you say. And what we're doing is we are creating value for words you say and access to what they really want.

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That's really important that you transfer the value. Food, toys, activities, all come through you. And the final part is testing the value, and that is adding distractions.

And we do that with great compassion. We do that, as I mentioned in episode number 301, starting with the distraction of you just sitting or standing or moving.

We're not going to add the distraction of trying to get a recall when your dog's off leash chasing a rabbit. That is too high of a distraction. We need to create and transfer value to you before we can test the value in high distraction areas.



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So, you're going to list all of the things that your dog finds distracting, and if you have a puppy, that's pretty much anything in life. List them all out. What is a zero distraction-free environment? That might just be like training in your bathroom or your bedroom. What is a 10? High, impossible - 'There's no way my dog will listen to me in this distraction.'

Know what is a zero, now what is a 10 and train appropriately. For the next two weeks train only in zero to one and a half distraction level environments. Now, what will you be training? First of all, we need to have a word that means 'come to me.'

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Now, if you've been using 'come' or 'here' or your dog's name, there's a very high probability you have poisoned that. Meaning the dog might be slow in their response. The dog might look at you and see if you've got something they want in the response, or the dog might just ignore you. That means you've used the cue and the dog's behavior wasn't what you wanted, at least a handful of times.

If you've ever had to repeat your recall twice, then you've [poisoned the cue](#). Because the recall word should mean 'head whip around and chase me,' not 'look and see if there's anything else to do.' Head whip and chase. And so, what I strongly encourage you to do is come up with a new word and ideally a word that has a different tone than the way you normally talk to your dogs.

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So, for example, if you were around the house and you go, "Oh, are you a good boy? Oh, that's so cute. Oh, I like you when you do that." And then all of a sudden you went, "Whoop, whoop!" "What's, what's that noise?" That could be your recall cue. Number one, it's different. Number two, nobody around the house is going to poison it because it's something that's yours. Number three, it's unique.

So even if the dog is distracted, once you've put in the value, "Whoop, whoop!" is a great sound. The dog's going to go, "Oh, wait a minute, that means games, that means fun, that means that I love it." What we have to do now is condition that cue to give it meaning, and that starts, all training starts with number one, [the game ItsYerChoice](#).

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Because recalls are just about one big game of ItsYerChoice. Right? That, do you want to chase a squirrel or come when I called you? It's your choice. I always give my dogs the choice, and guess what? They always choose correctly. Why? Because I follow the strategy I'm sharing with you right now.

ItsYerChoice and [Crate Games](#) are the foundation of everything we do. Once you've got those two games in place, and we'll give you links in the show notes how you can get them. Then we're going to go with the third game which is Call Once. And this is a great activity. You can play with other people in your family.

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If you are by yourself, you're going to put your dog on a leash in a zero-distraction environment, meaning there's nothing of interest to them. You're going to make that sound, "Whoop!" or whatever you choose to be your recall word, and then you're going to give your dog a high value reward.

You're going to repeat that maybe three or four times, and that's the end of your session. We want the dog to now be conditioned just like we're conditioning a clicker.



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That word means 'whip your head around something amazing's going to happen'. You can play it in different rooms of your house, but don't play it in a room where there's other things that distract you. And I say only do it three or four times, because once your dog knows you've got that high value reward, they're just going to be staring at you.

So, you're not going to be rehearsing a head whip, you're going to be rehearsing a fixated stare. So, you can do this several times throughout the day, just practicing at your 'whoop, whoop.' Now if you've got family members, you can get in a little circle and one person "whoop, whoop" the dog and they go across the circle to the next person.

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And that is the Call Once Game. And that's a great way for the dog to learn to listen to everybody in the family. So, another game that's super important that you can play with the Call Once Game is the [Collar Grab Game](#). When the dog comes in before you give them the high value food, before you show them the high value food, you reach with your hand, grab the collar, and then present the food.

If they see the food first, there is no conditioning happening of your hand. Grab the collar, present the food. Why do I want you to do that? If you do that often enough, when you're lunging for your dog, maybe there's a bus coming towards them, that hand means something good's going to happen. If you don't play this with a collar grab, the dog will come in, try to grab the food and then leave again.

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Collar Grab is super important. Games like the [Hand Target](#) will help create a great collar grab. So be sure you're doing a lot of hand targets as well. And the final game that I'm going to suggest you play is one called Restraint Recalls.

We're going to leave a link in the show notes that you can [download the step-by-step](#) on how you correctly play restraint recalls, to help jack up the value of your new recall word.

Now that we've established value and we started transferring the value to your new recall word, we have to test the value, and that happens in layers.

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Again, you start in very low distraction environment and grow that value up. And people are going to say, "Well Susan, what happens if my dog doesn't come when I do 'whoop, whoop'?" That means you jumped some layers and so you need to go back to where you had success.

And what you don't do is you don't get emotional about it. You don't get mad at your dog. You don't go stomping your feet. You don't grab the dog and "What did you do?!" No. If you want to punish somebody, just give yourself a smack in the head and say, "Wow. I think I jumped the gun and put in a layer before my dog was ready."

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There are many more games that can help your dog learn to come no matter what the distraction and those are in our Recalls program. Now, you can do a lot.

If you're not in a position to become a member of our Recalls program, but if you are, I'm going to give you the opportunity to join right here and now. If you go to my website, you will see Recalls retails just under a thousand dollars.



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Because you are listening to this episode, if you write my team at [wag@dogsthat.com](mailto:wag@dogsthat.com) and with the subject line 'I need my dog to come when called.', then we will give you an opportunity to join the program at the lowest investment we've ever offered it.

So, 'I need my dog to come when called.' will be the subject line. And my team will help you become a member of our year-long coaching program where you not only teach the dog how to ignore distractions and come when called, but also all the other valuable lessons that we have in Recallers, like how to walk on a loose leash, how to bring me a toy, how to be calm and accept getting your nails trimmed.

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Everything and every game that I've mentioned on today's podcast, we will coach you through the appropriate way to deliver the reinforcement. There's just so much value that will happen [when you video your training](#), and you send us the videos and let us coach you to have better mechanics.

So that you can use all the things your dog loves to not only create an amazing recall but deepen that amazing relationship that you're currently building with your dog. It is possible. The need for tools is not necessary.

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What needs to happen is that you're following a strategy that will bring you the success that your dog needs based on what the instinctive drives of your dog, is telling them is an anti-recall. Let's turn that all around and get those things working for you. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Join Recallers:

Write to us at [wag@dogsthat.com](mailto:wag@dogsthat.com) the subject line "I need my dog to come when called" for a very special opportunity to join us in Recallers.

### Download the Step by Step Restraint Recalls Guide

[How to Play Restraint Recalls](#)

### ItsYerChoice Summit

[Learn How to Play ItsYerChoice](#)

### Crate Games

[Get Crate Games Online](#)





## Episode: #302

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### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 255: Rescue Dog Training: Priorities For Your First Week Together](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 214: England Banned Shock Collars, Here's Why That Could Be Sad News](#)

[Podcast Episode 301: When Dog Training Doesn't Go As Planned: How To Make Adjustments To Find Success](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 90: Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value](#)

[Podcast Episode 52: The Five Most Common Words in Dog Training and Which Ones I Never Use](#)

[Podcast Episode 18: 4 Puppy and Dog Training Games for Acquired Bite Inhibition](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Target Training for Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 295: Fear Of Criticism? Why Facing The Camera Is The First Step To Becoming A Better Dog Trainer](#)



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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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