

The First 2 Weeks With Your Puppy: What You Grow Is What You Get

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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Because the one thing you do not want to have as a 1-year-old puppy is a long list of regrets because of things you didn't do. Most puppy challenges do not start out as problems. Things like greeting the dog by letting them jump all over you. When they're an adult dog, is that okay for them to greet other people like that? So, what is a better solution?

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett and this is Shaped by Dog, where dog training finally makes sense at both ends of the leash. Today, I want to tell you a story about friends of mine who live here on the property with their brand-new Golden Doodle.

They've had Poet for about 10 days, and it's really given me a fresh perspective because although I know many of the people listening to our podcast are first time pet owners, I rarely get to see the activity of first-time pet owners upfront.

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Now, to be honest, Michelle owned a dog with her partner about 10 years ago. Brandon, brand new to pet ownership. And guess what? They're doing a lot of really good things. They're doing a lot of things well. And there's things that they just don't know that experience is going to bring them. Experience and yours truly, of course.

But this gives me a great opportunity to help those of you who have a puppy for the very first time, or those of you who know somebody who has a puppy for the very first time, or those of you who might be struggling with a puppy or a dog, because you might see yourself in some of the mistakes that Brandon and Michelle have made.

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Let me just set the stage. Brandon and Michelle live in a large room. They have access to a kitchen. The puppy is raised in an upper loft with a flight of stairs. That's really important because if you've listened to Shaped by Dog in the past, you know, we don't want puppies doing stairs.

Brandon and Michelle are super kind people, and they are leading their training with kindness, which is so nice to see. In this episode, it's not about pointing fingers or showing fault. It's about sharing how you could accidentally be growing behaviors that you don't want to see when you're not focused on the right things as your puppy is growing and developing.

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Before Poet arrived, Brandon and Michelle did a deep dive into [Shaped by Dog](#) to get a background of what they might expect and how they should [prepare the environment](#) for the puppy. So, they did a lot of great things. They set up a gated environment in their living quarters. They had [a crate](#) in that gated environment.

I gave them two critical lessons. Number one, because they both work from home, I knew how important it would be that we set the stage right away for [preventing separation anxiety](#) because separation anxiety isn't something you want to train out of. You want to train to prevent it.



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The second lesson that I gave them was how to carry a puppy up and down stairs, because it's super important that you secure that puppy. Gather the leash in one hand, put that hand under the puppy's bum. Now the leash is attached to a collar or a harness, the other free hand loops under the collar, holds the puppy by the chest.

This gives you three safety belts, as it were, if that puppy happens to squirm as you're going down the stairs. We don't want any accidents. And of course, my advice is we don't let that puppy walk downstairs until they are, I don't know, five months old. So, it's a long flight of stairs. We've got to prepare that puppy to be handled as they're going down that flight of stairs.

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Some puppies just don't like being carried up and down stairs. I don't know if it's a visual thing, but they might get upset. You want to condition them to being held and carried before you make the trip up and down stairs. Yes, this is management but think of management not as restrictive but rather as proactive.

Because the one thing you do not want to have as a 1-year-old puppy is a long list of regrets because of things you didn't do. Regrets can be minor, from now you've got a problem behavior, to major, now you've got a lifelong injury or worse.

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So, I said they did a lot of things right. And one of the things they did right was this gated community. They went on Marketplace. They got this beautiful pen that has clear panels so they can see that puppy when they're lying in bed or working at their desk. The one mistake they didn't do, though, is they never, ever closed the door of the crate for the puppy.

So, he chose to sleep in that crate every night, but after the first night, he chose to come out and pee on the floor. So how did they deal with that? Rather than acting on [Crate Games](#) and conditioning the puppy to being okay with the crate door closed, what they did is they set alarms, so they'd get up during the night to take the puppy out.

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10 days later, I asked how everything was going, and that's when I learned that they were still taking the puppy out in the middle of the night, and their defense was "His little wee bladder, he can't hold that. So, he had to pee."

And I said, "Listen, if someone was to wake me up at two o'clock in the morning, I promise you I would have a pee. But if they'd let me sleep till 8:00 AM, would that be glorious for me! If they let me sleep till 6:00 AM I would be 100% fine."

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So, the misunderstanding was believing that the puppy woke up and peed once he roamed around in his big pen meant he had a small bladder and couldn't hold his pee. And that just wasn't the case. Being proactive would've made this easier when I told them in 40 years of owning a puppy after the first night, I have [never been woke up by a puppy](#) who needed to go out.

Of course, I would take them out if they needed to. They just don't wake up. But if you give them access for free roaming with toys in their pen, yes, they will. And when they're moving around, they go, "Hey, I got to pee. I think I will." I know Brandon and Michelle were just extending that kindness to their puppy.



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But the truth is, structure builds confidence and behaviors much faster than kindness alone ever could. Probably 30 years ago when I started introducing reinforcement-based dog training to the people who followed me, I coined the phrase 'Positive is not permissive.' Meaning just because we aim to train with positive reinforcement doesn't mean that we allow the puppy or the dog to do what they want when they want.

That kind of goes back to the last point. The puppy has the right to be in their pen, be in their crate, play with the toys, do what they want when they want. So, whenever there's any kind of restriction on the puppy who's had this free reign, there will be hesitation and resistance to a restriction to freedom.

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That may show up in trying to walk a puppy on a leash before they have any relationship to [Reinforcement Zone](#) or following you, or how much fun you could be. Your intentions of having this amazing puppy who loves you is a relationship that needs to be grown.

But being permissive means there'll be more friction, there'll be more hesitation, and when that hesitation in the puppy is meant by you allowing them the freedom to do what they want when they want, then that hesitation creates the friction, which often will create the puppy disengaging.

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And so, the kinder you are, the more disengaging that puppy will become as they look for reinforcement in their environment. Giving a puppy agency doesn't mean they have free roam to lead you wherever they want to go; they have free roaming rights to decide.

Do they want to be in a crate or not? They have free roaming rights to say, "I'm going to eat now," "No, I'm not going to eat now," "You will play with me now," "No, you won't play with me now." That's not what agency looks like because sometimes leadership involves picking a puppy up and moving them away from a distraction.

Leadership understands that a relationship has to take time to develop. Therefore, giving the kid the keys to the Lamborghini is going to mean there's likely going to be poor choices made somewhere down the road that's going to lead to horrible outcomes.

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Good leadership guides decisions in a way that the puppy thinks it was their idea. And look forward to making another good choice with you in the future. So, to be clear, positive is not permissive. Positive training still requires leadership, but good leadership does not require accompanying intimidation or punishment.

Another great decision that Brandon and Michelle made was enrolling in Recallers and starting to play Recall games with their puppy right from the start. That was so cool to see. But then what I saw was them taking the puppy off leash in big environments where the puppy once again had the freedom to disengage to say, "You could be fun but let me just check out what else might be more fun." "And if I decide this isn't as fun, I'll come back to you, and you can give me the fun that you have."

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That was met with Brandon and Michelle saying his name, "Poet. Poet. Poet." I heard his name before they would say, "Poet, here," "Poet, sit," "Poet, down." Lots of things with the word Poet involved. And what was happening was we were teaching Poet that [his name is kind of meaningless](#).



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And a puppy ignoring his name is potentially dangerous. We want the name to have what I call a head whip reaction. It's sacred. It could save a puppy's life. [And if you have kids](#), you only allow the kids to use it if there's an obvious path to certain reinforcement. Because every ignored recall or every "Poet" ignored is a deposit into more ignoring in the future.

So, what is a better solution? When we're playing games, maybe have a leash dragging for the first week until we could be certain of the puppy's responses. Crisp behaviors, lots of fun, money in the relationship bank. No withdrawals into the environment bank. Building a future together.

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Brandon and Michelle are so close to being right there. Just a few little tweaks that I'm sure many of you listening to this could use as well. Now, I slipped in another little human mechanical error that I'd like to see cleaned up, and that was, I said they said, "Poet, sit," "Poet, down," "Poet, here." And what that means is they were [naming behavior](#) with a puppy they'd only had for a week.

Do you believe that the behavior they were naming was crisp and well understood? Highly unlikely. If we remember that behavior is built by the ABC's - [Antecedent Behavior Consequence](#), the Antecedent [the cue sit](#) should only be added when there's certainty and clarity with what the puppy will do and how happily they do it.

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I want joy when I say sit, I want joy in that, what that puppy's choosing to do. I don't want them to look around. I don't want it to be slow. I don't want it to be on the second or third time I say it. How do we get that? We don't name behaviors early. So, giving a puppy all these words in the first week is going to dilute their understanding of any words.

Fluency of behavior in a puppy comes long before vocabulary. You want to condition the behavior you want. So of course, when we're playing Crate Games, I will feed my puppy for sitting in the crate, high and at the back, under the distraction of the door opening. But I don't tell them that to sit. I condition a position that they love to be in it.

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I will condition when I greet them that they sit, they'll get my praise, they'll get maybe a treat, they'll get maybe a toy. Before everything that's fun, I will wait till I get a sit. I don't name the sit, but very quickly the puppy will anticipate when this certain situation happens upon me, I'm in the crate and they touch the door, or I'm in Reinforcement Zone, or somebody comes to greet me, I'm going to adopt to sit.

We're conditioning a location. We're conditioning a specific target. We're conditioning what we want your body to do. Conditioning without confusing. Condition before you name. Do not be in a hurry to name a behavior. And people I know, the next thing they say to me was, "Susan, how will the puppy ever know what to do if I don't say sit, sit, sit."

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Do you think they're born knowing English? And if you're listening to this from Germany, do you think they're born knowing German or, I mean that's a lot of different languages the puppy would have to be born knowing because who knows who might adopt them.

They don't understand language. They understand behaviors that have been conditioned, where we bring the value that is important to them.



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And once we've got a great behavior, then we can name it with a label that's bright and shiny and meaningful. Because as you go to greet your puppy and you know they're about to sit, you could then add the cue. And you could start adding the cue in at different times when you can predict the behavior is going to happen.

Now you've got efficiency of behavior without artifacts of needing two or three cues. You've got joy, you've got bright eyes, you've got ears on top of the head. You've got expectancy of this is going to be fun. That's when I name behaviors. My dogs, by the time they're 18 months old, probably know 100 cues. But they know them all with clarity, confidence, and joy.

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Do not be in a hurry to name something that you should be conditioning. Likewise, you don't want to dilute the effectiveness of those cues by using them as a word of praise. A little mistake that got slipped in here several times is they would say, "Poet, sit," and then they would repeat, "Good sit, good sit, good sit."

Now, I've talked about this on Shaped by Dog before. It's something that traditional dog training taught us all. It's something that many dog trainers continue to teach. But think about it from the dog's point of view. You've created a word that is a verb. It's an action. Take action, move from a stand to a sit, move from a down to a sit, pop.

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If I was to say 'good sit' to one of my dogs and they were already sitting, do you know what they would do? They would put up their butt and they would sit again. Because sit is a verb. When you use it as a word of praise, it doesn't help that puppy understand any better what they just did. All it does is dilute the effectiveness of the cue.

When you say, 'good sit' or 'good down,' what you're doing is you're telling the dog, this is a cue that you can ignore from time to time. I want you to do it with this criteria, with joy and expediency and speed. But there are times, just ignore it and keep doing what you're doing. It's got to make sense to the dog.

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When we look at raising a puppy with a long lens on, you've got to consider that all of these are little mistakes. None of them are life altering. All of them can be course corrected, but all of them added together will create confusion where we want clarity. Brandon and Michelle are doing an amazing job playing Recaller games, raising Poet with clarity.

They've gone through [the puppy playlist on YouTube](#) with all of our Shaped by Dog episodes. They're growing their understanding of the science of behavior and how dogs learn going through those podcasts. They're developing what I can see is an amazing relationship through their ongoing playing of the Recaller games.

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And they're helping to teach that puppy recovery, resiliency, regulation, through Crate Games. And yes, closing the crate door, and yes, moving the crate and having the puppy in new environments alone. It's tough when you're there 24/7, you're building this unhealthy attachment that when you do have to go away, you've changed the world.



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And that's the long lens of raising a puppy. What am I doing now with that puppy that might have to change later? What am I doing now that potentially has repercussions I don't want to deal with later? Things like greeting the dog by letting them jump all over you. When they're an adult dog, is that okay for them to greet other people like that?

Use the long lens when you're evaluating what you're doing with your puppy. Listen, most puppy challenges do not start out as problems. They start out as small kind decisions made every single day. Multiple times throughout the day. The puppy is they're like sponges. They are constantly learning through the experiment of choice and the outcomes of that choice.

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Recallers exists to help pet owners make good decisions today with the future in mind so that they aren't just hoping things are going to turn out all right down the road. They're confident. They see the clarity changing every single week.

They don't see things getting worse. They don't see things staying the same and hoping the puppy will outgrow it. They have confidence because every layer of certainty, confidence, and clarity that they're adding to that relationship between them and their puppy changes the puppy.

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They see the good choices made right before their eyes. And hey, if you're in the midst of raising a puppy or rescue dog yourself, and you'd like that kind of clarity and certainty with your relationship with your puppy, I'll leave a link to Recallers in the show notes.

Thanks for joining me today. And as always, stay curious, stay humble, and continue to make life better at both ends of the leash. I'll see you next time, right here on Shaped by 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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