

Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

Today we're going to debunk the old myth that "your dog should work because you said so." That reinforcement after a certain stage really isn't necessary.

00:00:22

Hi, I am Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Now many people buy into this myth because they kind of see it themselves. They'll say, "Susan, my dog only works when they see the treats." And that isn't because of the innate wiring of the dog's brain. It really is because of a flawed use of that reinforcement.

And so, in today's episode, I'm gonna share with you how you can evolve your dog's reinforcement strategy. And then, your dog isn't going to be in a place, where maybe a kid is when they know their parents are coming home with ice cream, so they suddenly will clean the room.

00:01:00

They connect the behavior only when they can see or sense the reinforcement otherwise like 'it's no big deal, I don't need to do that.' Or putting on your seatbelt when you see a police officer. You've connected the consequence with a behavior, so you do the behavior only when the consequence is obvious.

We need to evolve your reinforcement strategy, so you don't get that. But I get it, there's still some traditional dog trainers that will tell you that using food in your training is a bribe or a crutch, and the dog won't work without it. And that's true if the focus of the training is attached just to that food.

00:01:41

So, think about you yourself. You get up, you go to work, every couple of weeks you get a paycheck. What if after like working at the same place for 10 years, they say, "Congratulations, you've graduated. You've got your 10-year anniversary. You really know how to do this job. Now we don't have to pay you anymore because we expect loyalty because we've trained you so well."

You're not staying around, right? Or if you planted this beautiful garden and you fertilize the garden and just when it was starting to bloom and give you some harvest, you said, "Well, that's it. I put in my work now, you're on your own. You should just provide for me." Eventually the weeds are gonna choke out your garden, everything's gonna die, and you've wasted all of that energy.

00:02:23

And so, we don't want to see that happen with your dog because what happens is, if we don't reinforce the behaviors we like with our dogs, then they will look for reinforcement somewhere else. So that somewhere else could be staring out the window, barking at people who go by the street, digging in the garden, shredding paper, shredding shoes, chewing on your furniture, just creating so much chaos because of the lack of clarity and the expectations that you have for them in their life.

Here's the truth, dogs are absolutely brilliant. But the challenge is people expect them to have full fluency of the human language and a full understanding of what they should do in every environment that they're ever put into. And the truth of that statement is, dogs are absolutely brilliant.



Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

00:03:12

They're brilliant learners, brilliant learners. But in order for somebody to be a brilliant learner, they need to have the guidance of a brilliant educator. I think there's this YouTube video that I think went around 10 years ago.

And it was this super long-haired kid in high school who had had enough of the way that his teacher was teaching, and he got up and he was storming out of class and he turned to her and said, "You want kids to come in here? You want them to get excited for this?"

"You've got to come in here. You've got to make him get excited. You want a kid to change and start doing better. You got to touch his freaking heart. Can't expect a kid to change. If all you do is tell him." Now we could take out the word kid and we could put in the word dog.

00:04:04

You want a dog to get excited for this? You've got to come in here. You've got to make them excited. You want a dog to change? You've got to touch their freaking heart. You can't expect a dog to change if all you do is just tell them. And that is just like so insightful for a young teenage kid. And there is a definite parallel between educating children and training dogs.

With training dogs, it's similar to parenting, is that you are creating a relationship. If you think of your relationship as a bank. And the reinforcement is deposits into that relationship bank. And the more deposits you put into that relationship bank, the more that relationship grows.

00:04:53

And when you ask a behavior that could be a withdraw on that bank, it really depends on how that behavior was grown. Because if you just tell the dog to do something and you ignore them when they do it, eventually they are not going to do as they're told. They realize they're not part of a team. That is a dictatorship.

They're gonna get slow. They're gonna get lethargic. They're going to maybe wait out till they see the goods first. "Where's the cookies?" "What do you got for me?" "You want me to come in and it's raining, and you've got to go to work, and you've got your high heels on? Show me the goods first. Not coming in."

00:05:29

So, we need to consider that this thing called dog training is really just developing a relationship. And here's why it sometimes goes wrong. Here's why sometimes the dog won't do as you ask, if you don't show them the goods first.

It's similar to why my late husband couldn't get the dogs to do much of anything. He adored the dogs. For the entire 24 years we were together, he was the one who fed the dogs, I would say 90% of the time. But why did they really not listen to him?

00:06:05

Because they knew their reinforcement had no contingencies, that they could come up while he was watching TV and start dancing and dancing and running towards the food bowls. And he would go, "Oh yeah, it's feeding time." And he would get up and feed them. They told him when they were to be reinforced. They would hang out at the cookie jar and stare at the cookie jar and stare at him and stare at the cookie jar and stare at him. "Oh, you want a cookie?" He would give them a cookie.



00:06:32

And so, let's talk about how we can evolve the current relationship with your dog and reinforcement and evolve it into a strategic use of that reinforcement. So, the first step is the dog loving food. Some of you don't have a dog that loves food. You need to create that love, and that could be a whole separate Shaped by Dog episode.

But when you find one food the dog loves, then you're going to use a second food. Maybe give it to them first and give them the higher value food second. So, we start with step number one as we evolve your reinforcement strategy. That is the [dog's got to love food](#). Because if they don't love food, you can't grow brilliant behaviors.

00:07:14

Brilliant behaviors are grown from brilliant reinforcement. So, number one, dog loves food. That's where a lot of you are. That the dog won't do anything unless they see the food. And so, we've got to go from step one all the way down to step five.

So, step two is, as I mentioned with my late husband John, we've got to add some contingencies to them getting their food. And that's where for me, one of the first games I play with my dogs is [the ItsYerChoice game](#). I've talked about it a lot on the podcast. I'm gonna leave a link in the show notes.

00:07:45

Contingencies on that reinforcement means you might have some cookies in your pocket. Now if you play ItsYerChoice, your dog will eventually ignore those cookies in the pocket because they know coming up and bopping you in the hip is not going to get cookies.

Or you might be like me, I have like food bowls around the house on the counters. And they're there if I see something amazing happening, then I will mark it. I might say, "Good dog." I might give what we call a spotlight, a [location specific reinforcement marker](#) "cook", and I'll walk over, and I'll give the dog a cookie.

00:08:17

So, what would that look like? Let's say I don't like my dogs in the kitchen when I'm eating, or I don't like my dogs in the kitchen when I'm cooking. If I see a dog in a dog bed on the peripheral of the kitchen, I'll give them a cookie, especially when they're puppies. I will intentionally make them want to be in those beds.

So that could be a contingency. The dog gets the surprise deposit into the relationship bank. 'I love when you're in that bed.' 'I love when you aren't barking when someone comes through the door.' Whatever you love, you're going to reinforce.

00:08:49

So, they don't see the food coming, they are in the midst of something, and then you go, "That's mighty good." And you reinforce them. There's a contingency on that. It could be you are training the dog with a training game, with a series of training games, with [a training plan](#) like our Recallers program.

Where we give you strategically layered games that help you evolve the reinforcement strategies with your dog. And the other thing that you need to do while you're growing contingencies on your reinforcement is, ignore the demand-ica dog. The dog that comes up and flips your hand and says, "I think you need to feed me. I think there's cookies back here." The dog that sits and barks at the cookie jar, the dog that wines when it's near dinner o'clock.



Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

00:09:34

You need to ignore the demand-ica dog, and you need to help grow their understanding that food, toys, activities are all reinforcement that are delivered, not demanded. Okay, so we've got 'Gotta love food.' 'Gotta, have some contingencies on that food.' Now we've got to transfer the value of that food.

Playing games where the dog does something and then they're reinforced, that's a way to transfer value. So, the value goes from the food into a game like [Crate Games](#). The transfer of value happens. So, any of you who've ever played Crate Games, I know that your dogs will love to fly into the crate because they've got such a history of reinforcement there. The value has been transferred.

00:10:19

It could be transferred into a [game of tug](#). Now you've got another valuable reinforcer. You're not always using food. You're sometimes using tug. It will be transferred into acts with you like the [Hand Target](#) or other games that now you can use.

If I'm out on a walk and I ask my dog to come near me, maybe I'm passing somebody, I will ask them to come into [Reinforcement Zone](#), another reinforced behavior at my side. While they're there, if I don't have any cookies, I'll just ask them for a hand touch. Highly unlikely I'm out for a walk without cookies, but it does happen. It does happen.

00:10:53

So, we've gone from the 'I love food' stage to 'contingencies on that food' to now we're transferring the value of the food to food, toys, games, activities. Now we're gonna grow the duration of the behavior. So, they're not gonna get a reinforcement the moment they get in the bed.

They might get in the bed around the kitchen, and you might walk around the kitchen a few times and then you're going to reinforce them. We're stretching out the duration between reinforcements so that eventually, let's say you wanted your dog in the bed while you're eating.

00:11:27

Well, first you're gonna have an amazing understanding of [what being in that bed means](#). You're going to grow that duration without you being at the dinner table. So, once you have this amazing behavior of your dog hanging out on a bed, now you're gonna do it while you are at the dinner table.

It might start with you having a couple of cookies that you throw back into the bed from time to time. But eventually you might get up, clear the table, give the dog a cookie, and go and do the dishes. And eventually it'll go to, 'I'm not even feeding the dog for being in their bed.'

00:11:59

But they're being in their bed because it's a highly reinforced position that will still randomly get reinforced like when I'm walking into the kitchen, when I have a new puppy. If I reinforce a puppy that's in a dog bed and I see another dog in the dog bed, they're getting reinforced as well.

So, we're growing duration of a specific behavior. We're also growing behaviors into other behaviors, a [behavior chain](#). So, you already have a behavior chain, I'm sure of it. You may not realize it, but you have one.

When you first got your puppy, I'd be willing to bet the first thing you did when you got up in the morning, if your puppy was in a crate, was to get them up and run outside with them so that they can eliminate outside.



Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

00:12:43

Now, eventually you got to the point where you would get up and you would go to the bathroom yourself, and then you would come and get your dog and get them outside. So, the reinforcement of relieving themselves outside now has been built into a chain. It doesn't go from, 'I'm out of bed, we're going outside.'

It's, 'I'm out of bed. I'll go to the bathroom. Then we'll go outside.' And it can grow even more when I am in a hotel and I might be on the trillionth floor, I get up. I will go to the bathroom, I'll shower. It might be 30 minutes before I go outside with my adult dogs. I wouldn't do this with a puppy, of course.

00:13:18

So, we're growing a behavior chain. For example, I mentioned Reinforcement Zone, a place on my side where my dogs find value because we've grown it from Recaller games. Now I might start stationary. The dog finds Reinforcement Zone on their own. They get a cookie for being there. Eventually, I'm gonna say, "You are so good at that, we find Reinforcement Zone, I'm gonna take a step and I'm gonna feed you."

So now, "You can find Reinforcement Zone. I can take one, two steps before I feed you." I might ping pong that, "You find Reinforcement Zone. I give you a cookie. We take three steps before you get your next cookie." That is growing a behavior chain and that is how the use of reinforcement is evolved in dog training.

00:14:01

I get it. It's a lot to know. I said off the top that dogs are brilliant learners, but they need brilliant educators. And the way that you become a brilliant educator is you invest in you. You invest in you. It might start by jumping into some of the [educational videos](#) that I have on my YouTube channel.

Potentially, you might join one of our online programs like Home School the Dog or Recallers. The key is the better you become, the smarter your dog appears. I'll give you a little example of this in real life. I just shot this training session for this podcast to demonstrate how I can take a really well-trained dog.

00:14:39

So, I brought in my dog This!, and I asked her to touch her nose to a [target stick](#). Something that she's been doing since she was a puppy. It's just a trick, you know, you can evolve it to do different things, but I use it really for teaching. So, you'll see, I asked her, she touches very discreetly, touches exactly to the end of the stick, and I deliver reinforcement.

Now, I purposely then become a dog trainer who isn't aware of how my mechanics affect my dog's behavior. So, the next time I present the stick, I click a clicker just like I did previously. Then I unzip my bait bag. Now I take out a piece of food, and then I break it into smaller pieces. Then I feed my dog, who is at this point now staring at my bait bag, and they get the cookie.

00:15:27

Now look how quickly this behavior gets eroded. A behavior that's been with this dog for at least four years, it's one that I taught her as a puppy. Look how quickly I can erode it just by not being conscientious of my mechanics.

How can you become conscientious of your mechanics? You have to know the nuances of dog training that leads to [good dog training mechanics](#). So, in this example it was, well, I've got two pieces of equipment I've got to figure out how to put them in the same hand.



Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

00:15:57

I've got to make sure that my bait bag is on the opposite hand so I can quickly get cookies and deliver them in a way that I separate the behavior from the reinforcement. Watch in this example, I'm going to feed her right at the end of the target stick. I'm gonna hold my cookies there. Now I've changed the behavior from 'touch your nose to the end of the target stick' to 'watch the food as you touch your nose to the end of the target stick'.

If I can take a very well-trained dog with a behavior they understand brilliantly and mess it up this badly, imagine how difficult it would be to train a brand-new rescue dog or a brand-new puppy who doesn't have this understanding, and you went in there with sloppy mechanics.

00:16:43

It's so worth you, investing in your understanding of dog training mechanics, the nuances that is going to bring clarity to your dog. If you do it, it not only benefits this dog. It benefits every dog you'll ever have after.

Plus, I promise you, training a dog from a place of seeking understanding for them, a place of compassion, a place of cooperation. It rewires your brain. You become a completely different person than before you started training this way.

00:17:20

If you would like to know more about any of our online programs so that you can evolve your own understanding of the reinforcement process, please contact my team at wag@dogsthat.com with the subject line "*I want to know more about rewarding.*" I want to know more about rewarding. I need to grow my understanding of rewarding.

The more you learn, the more brilliant your dog gets, and I would love for you to appreciate the brilliance that you have in your dog as a learner. They're waiting to shine. They just need you to be the one to help shine them. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

To know more about our online programs:

Write to us at wag@dogsthat.com with the subject line: *I want to know more about rewarding*

Learn To Play ItsYerChoice:

[Learn how to play the ItsYerChoice \(IYC\) Game](#)

Crate Games

[Get Crate Games Online](#)

Hand Target and More Foundational Games

Get the Hand Target Game and more foundational training games in our free Connected Dog Season of Nuance Video Series running for a limited time - <https://learn.doggyflix.com/interactive/>





Episode: #306

Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 272: 10 Engaging Chase Games To Increase Your Picky Eater Dog's Food Drive](#)

[Podcast Episode 151: How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!](#)

[Podcast Episode 172: How To Teach Your Dog Anything With My Training Plan](#)

[Podcast Episode 89: Why Dogs Should Not Tug: The Truth Revealed](#)

[Podcast Episode 68: 3 Easy Tricks Every Dog Should Know](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 266: Hot Zone And Stays – How One Dog Training Nuance Can Fix Anxiety And Duration](#)

[Episode 126: How Dog Training Goes Better When You Begin With The End In Mind \(Backchaining\)](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Sit, Down, Stand, Stay! Dog Training Duration with Susan Garrett.](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 289: Stop Just Watching Dog Training Videos: Mastering Active Learning Instead!](#)



Dog Only Listens With Treats? Use This 5 Step Process To Build Better Behaviors

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.



Meet Us Online

Website	https://dogsthat.com
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/SusanGarrettDogAgility/
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/
TikTok	https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat
LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat
Pinterest	https://pinterest.ca/dogsthatcom/
Twitter	https://twitter.com/susangarrett
YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/c/DogsThat
YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/user/ClickerDogs

