



Bridging the Communication Gap with our Animal Friends

by Brigitte Noel

Most dogs respond well to conventional obedience training. Others experience all sorts of challenges which often stem from miscommunication. As an intuitive animal behaviorist, my goal is to understand the dog's perspective, as well as the human's perspective. The person's perception and the animal companion's viewpoint about identical circumstances can be different.

Big or small, the point of divergence is the source of misunderstanding. Non-verbal animal communication allows me to sidestep the pitfalls of speculation and ask animals directly why they do what they do. They answer willingly and help clear up the confusion about their circumstances.

A Yorkshire terrier named Muffin came to my office after weeks of training with reputable trainers. Muffin's person, Carolyn, was in tears. She and Muffin were inseparable since the dog was 12 weeks old, but their 8-year relationship was going through a meltdown.

Muffin had gone from a happy dog to an anxious, aggressive one. Left alone, she urinated in the house and barked to show her displeasure and frustration. A

professional trainer felt the solution was to establish that Carolyn was in charge of her dog, and not the other way around. Ignoring Muffin in specific circumstances was an important component of creating healthy boundaries. It worked; Muffin became subdued and cooperative.

For all her training success in handling Muffin, Carolyn was miserable. She felt that the heart-felt interaction with her dog had become lost in the training process. Muffin didn't look too happy either.

I listened attentively to Carolyn's viewpoint and then turned to Muffin. Looking straight at me was a well built, athletic, highly intelligent dog. The following are excerpts of the non-verbal communication Muffin and I shared:

Muffin: *I am so excited to be here (in BN's office). Please let my person know I am bored. I need something to do. I have come to be a companion [and] I am a very good companion.*

BN: *Please explain, "Companion."*

Muffin: *I need to be talked to; I need to be included. Right now I am not included—I feel left out.*



Candidly, Muffin added that Carolyn had become boring and that her husband had always been boring. Then I asked her about her aggression episodes with other dogs. After some hesitation, Muffin explained with emotion:

I don't like other dogs. I am not a dog.

BN: *Then what are you?*

Muffin: *I am a companion. A dog is ignored; a dog is not important. I am very important.*

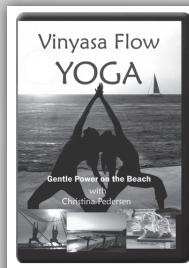
A discussion with Carolyn revealed her husband had retired and they were living at a much slower pace. Many of the outings and activities she and Muffin used to enjoy fell by the wayside. She tried play dates, and Muffin became aggressive.

All along, Muffin had been acting out her frustration. The changes in the home just didn't suit her nature or personality. Ignoring her in order to create proper boundaries and leadership ad-

dressed the effect, but not the root cause of the boredom. During the session, Carolyn felt the cover was lifted from her eyes and she finally saw what had led her little friend to become contrary. Carolyn and I designed a program that incorporated new outings, plenty of exercise and no play dates. Some dogs prefer the company of human beings, which is perfectly okay. After only a few weeks of the new program, Muffin regained her former good cheer and behavior. Four years later, thanks to this clear line of communication, Muffin continues to delight Carolyn, who knows how to keep her now slightly less active 12-year-old companion happy and well behaved.

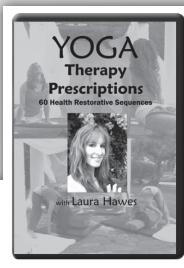
Brigitte Noel, M.Ms. is a long time San Diego based Animal Communicator and author. For more information on her consulting services for people and their animals, go to BrigitteNoel.com or call 619.295.5504.

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