

Dogs Don't Lie, they Act!

Maureen Ross, MA | January 6, 2012



Do we really know what another human being or dog is actually feeling? REALLY? Check out [Don Miguel Ruiz / The Fifth Agreement](#).

I have been [living and learning with dogs](#) for over fifty years (began very young -- giggle). For fifteen years I have been counseling people with and without dogs present, giving me opportunities to observe the difference. Nothing is perfect, but my job is easier when there is a dog present, provided the dog isn't fearful of revealing secrets (like people who avoid the truth in fear of retribution or those too proud to admit that maybe they can entertain trying something differently). I know I have ancestors who are cheering me on because I broke the mold (pattern).

Dogs don't lie, they act. They highlight, sometimes subtlety, other times overtly, what is needed through behavior and body language.

Psychologists, Health Care Professionals, Intuitive Practitioners, Behaviorists, Veterinarians and Vegetarians (not kidding) share that they can "tell what is going on with the dog by noticing the relationship with the owner and nutrition." I empathize, knowing it works.

My behavior affects my dogs, and they let me know with their approach (body language, breathing patterns, well-being, eyes). It is in the moment, spontaneous, amazingly accurate and speaks volumes. Dogs are a barometer, mirroring stress levels, anger, hurt and blissful ignorance. And, they are accepting and non-judgmental.

Given the myths behind why people love to be with dogs, I am 95% positive that dogs don't lie, but love in response to our emotions, conditions, associations, training (or lack of), and socialization.

Dogs don't lie, they choose. Dogs don't like everyone or every dog, nor should they be expected too!

Genetics plays a part, environment pulls the trigger, but usually a dog avoids conflict. What we misinterpret as aggression is oftentimes they way of dealing with conflict. Humans can be antagonistic. So can dogs. They learn it from us. Ever notice when you are angry at someone, your dog may growl. They don't even know why. They are taking our lead.

[Dogs Never Lie About Love](#) by [Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson](#) is one of my favorite books. Jeffrey reflects: "how do we know what we feel, let alone

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what somebody else feels? Speaking to others we often use shorthand. Does one really know what another human being is feeling? It may be no harder to find out the truth about feelings in dogs than it is in humans."

*"Marvelous as may be the power of a dog to understand my moods, deathless as is his affection and fidelity, his mental state is as unsolved a mystery to me as it was to my remotest ancestor."
~Williams James*

Humans have a tendency to restrict themselves with embellished and dramatic stories of what is -- (entertainment, boredom, fear, embarrassment, attention, acceptance, love). It is our story.

Let's be honest. Humans are ambivalent. We can love and hate, laugh and be angry with the same person, on the same day, and don't remember why at the end of the day. Dogs do not have this ambivalence. Dogs associate people with actions, and ACT accordingly depending on the outcome.

Dogs don't lie, they change their minds, just like humans. They have good days and not so good days. Some dogs may need more management than others, while peeling away the layers, just like humans in therapy.

I believe that one of the reasons that many humans, including myself, have such an intense relationship with our dogs (or other pets) is that they mirror our soul and behaviors. We have a mutual understanding of each other's emotions. There is an acceptance and instantaneous forgiveness of our oftentimes sporadic or codependent flaws.

Dogs don't lie, they pee when they can't hold it any longer. If they pee in the house, it's because they haven't been confined or let out. If they chew something, they haven't been taught what to chew, when and where.

The joie de vivre of a dog, living in the present moment, frolicking in the snow or rolling in the grass, splashing in water, sleeping, dreaming upside-down and thoroughly enjoying their meal -- makes us feel -- joyful and jealous! I want to be that carefree and uninhibited.

While I work on another book, and type this living and learning story, three dogs are sleeping. My Newfie is upside-down as uninhibited as a newborn, breathing softly. My Border Terrier is on the sofa twitching. I want to know what she is chasing (chipmunk, wolf, bus)? I can guess. A stuffed Kermit the Frog just fell on her. She half-opened one eye, "oh it's you Kermie."

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The Greyhound is curled up tight as a ball. She weighs 59lbs and sleeps as if a 29 lb dog. I believe she slept this way in a crate as an ex-racer for 5-years. She is use to cuddling up to herself, staying warm and safe, and always watching with one eye open. After several months, she is beginning to realize that she can safely stretch her legs. I will ease one leg out, one leg in (hokey pokey). She looks quizzical, leaving it out for a few seconds. She pulls it back in and over her ear (yoga style). One paw is over the nose. I pull it the left leg out; she pulls the leg in. In a year, maybe she will trust enough to sleep stretched out as free as her flat stuffy Mr. Bo Dangles.

Dogs don't lie, they habituate. It has a gripping hold, just like with us humans. Patterns take time to change. They will spring back to a comfort zone. We have to keep stretching. Feeding Cali-Rose outside of her crate was a scary challenge for her. Every nuance of sound startled her. Is the person coming to take the bowl away, clean my crate, or pop a muzzle on to exercise in a yard with dogs I don't really trust? Who knows? I can observe and make experiential assumptions from the consistency of the behavior, when it changes, and encourage the more freeing behavior or what "I think" is in her best interest. Slow and easy is in her best interest. In spite of my knowing she is safe and sound, this is her normal, her familiarity. Stripping that from a dog or human too quickly could be deleterious. When I try to rush her into comfort, her face and eyes bulge, telling me, "too soon, I'm safer in a ball, in my crate, paw over my head, go away." I say, "okay."

Aside from what dogs mean to us as individuals, and this varies widely and culturally, we care about what dogs think about us. Admit it, we do! I have heard people say time and again, "my dog is mad at me." We cannot make assumptions about this and we cannot get clarity by asking them to tell us. Dogs show us by how they A.C.T. towards us (and others).

Dogs don't lie and they don't write books or do research. The general observations of decades is that dogs form packs, the leader (or Alpha) is the biggest and strongest (ugh) and wisest. The Beta (or female) is the second in command. The Omega (bottom of the pack) is worthless. So not true. The integrity and survival of the pack is the whole pack working as a team.

We really don't know as much as we thought we did about hierarchy. New paradigms have allowed us to evolve. How freeing. One leg in, one leg out.

We assume that dominance is as simple as watching puppies navigate their way in a whelping box or dogs in a park. Then we pick the Alpha, Beta,

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Omega, bully, runt and so on. I have asked owners to describe what they call Omega. Oftentimes, it sounds more like the person who has two of three drinks of courage before they can express their feelings. One loosens us up, two we are bit braver. By three we babble or bluster like crowing roosters.

Dogs don't lie and they aren't stupid. They know we aren't dogs.

*You are in a big room filled with people. Who do you notice? Who do you want to meet? The person skulking in the corner -- The loud one wearing a lamp shade -- The argumentative bully, holding a glass of Scotch? In walks **Meryl Streep**, grounded, confident and smiling. Behind her is Michelle Obama, then Oprah Winfrey. Oh my, is that Maya Angelou? Confident people have an aura about them. Sure they have egos, but they are not egocentric. You don't have to be knock-outs in the looks department either. The room revolves around them, with respect, for a reason. In a dog pack, the calm, confident dog is usually the so-called leader of the Pack. The rest are drinking up the courage to be one!*

In the wild, the pack leader cannot expend needless energy. They need to work, as a pack, to hunt and stay safe. In the family pack, the dog needs to find its place in the pack. They learn how to get their needs met in a different environment. They accomplish this by catering to us humans.

Dogs don't lie about domestication. We have domesticated the dog, and the dog has domesticated us! It is a mutual and historical evolution that no-one is certain about. Did the wolf join the Indians or did the Indians chase the Wolf off the recent kill to eat it?

The Stockholm syndrome, where the kidnapped fall in love with their jailers (sometimes well beyond the limits of their confinement), may help us put into perspective how dogs willingly please, and play us, for their survival and needs. We are our dog's best advocate for a full life.

Dogs don't lie about food. Simply watching a puppy or stray, eye's popping, body excited, sit-twitching, says everything about what a dog will do for food, attention and play while we watch as voyeurs in glee.

I've said this a thousand times, and will continue to stand by this. I may have it written on my tombstone: If you feed your dog twice a day, you have 14 training opportunities a week, in about 3-minutes, to ask for watch-me, sit, down, stay, YES, good dog. [Doggy Diner, Maureen Ross](#). There is no such thing as my dog won't eat or will get fat. Dogs have to eat to live. Eating healthy, and using this to train, expends energy while developing a relationship of trust. Spacing the feeding out, not overindulging, may be a cornerstone to changing our own unhealthy eating behaviors! Smaller, healthier portions, colored with age-appropriate exercise are the key to a quality life for dogs and humans.

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My dogs don't lie, they lie down. They tell me when I'm slacking off or confusing them with their attitude. I yell, they bark loud. I get angry; they walk away or lie down, look away or yawn to calm me and themselves.

Have you ever noticed body language at family celebrations or business meetings? People place themselves in various postures around the table (leaning forward, back, crossed legs, arms, uncrossed, falling asleep, pretending to listen or not). Who is confident and secure, and in which environment? Example: Is the person, at a family gathering, after having a few glasses of wine, who leans forward, elbows on table, hands folded, dictating the day's events, the boss? Or, is it the one who recognizes this body language, sits up straight, but not rigid, leans back, with a relaxed face, slight smile, and chooses to have eye contact, or not, and may even turn their head away and yawn? They may say, "Excuse me, I have to pee" and leave? Choose the latter. This is the leader!

Dogs don't lie they act. [A.C.T. \(awareness centered training\)](#) is based on our relationships (training, play, love) as we grow with our dogs. [Training dogs has changed my life!](#) I have observed how it has changed others, making them better people.

Dogs don't lie, they change the energy in the room. When dogs are around, we act differently. Breathing patterns change. The focus is on the dog, rather than our own idiosyncrasies.

I work with dogs with pet-assisted therapy. Counselors share how they bring their dog to a session, with prior approval, paying attention to their client. The client shares with the dog or pets the dog, and calms down. [A Cry Unheard, Dr. James Lynch.](#) | [The Power of the Wagging Tail by Dr. Dawn Marcus.](#)

The benefits of living and learning with dogs shines through if we are open to learning from another species. The strong emotions we feel towards our dogs are because they sense and accept us, as we are.

Dogs don't lie, they listen. That's why we love them. They don't judge!

We don't lie, we teach. I believe dogs know they have a job to do with humans. There are no coincidences in what dog you choose, or if they choose you or you adopt or buy.

They come to us as living beings that can change our lives, making us better humans. Enjoy the journey. [Maureen and the Pack](#)