



# LISTENING WITHOUT JUDGING

**GUEST: LAURIE SCHULZE, DVM**

[00:00:00] **Colleen Pelar:** Welcome back to Unleashed (at work & home). I'm Colleen Pelar, and I'm joined today by Dr. Laurie Schultze, who is a veterinarian who specializes in behavior work in Ohio. So I wanted to talk to her today about listening and understanding what someone else is saying to us because of course our animals don't speak to us with words, but they're communicating all the time and, with humans, sometimes our language gets in the way. So we want to talk a little bit about listening today. Laurie, can you tell us a little bit about what got you interested in behavior work with animals?

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** When I was little I was always fascinated with dolphins and thinking I wanted to be a dolphin trainer. I think I've always been interested in behavior. Then as I got into veterinary medicine, I just started seeing people are having problems with their pets with behavior concerns were just that much at risk for losing their home or relinquishment so and their relationship, you know, the you know, if the dog was [00:01:00] stressed at the office, I was trying to figure out what ways, you know, we could do to help them.

So I just kind of got drawn, and behavior when I was going through veterinary school wasn't as, it's more, it's kind of grown. I've kind of grown with it. Uh, so we didn't have classes on behavior. And I had one elective my senior year. So a lot of my education I got through professionally, but outside, you know, veterinary conferences and the more I learned, the more I realized especially on one of the topics we're going to talk today is things I didn't know about basic body language, because I wasn't taught, that once I learned my eyes just opened up to oh my gosh these animals aren't, you know, they're they're not mad or well, they're not angry at me. They're not trying to hurt me personally. They're terrified or they're afraid so it just totally changed my perception. And also I started seeing, oh my gosh, if I didn't know this, my owners don't know that either [00:02:00] and finding that I want to help, you know, protect the bond between people because if there's a behavior problem, they're just a much risk for losing their home or dying from the behavior problem through euthanasia just as if they had parvo or cancer. So I wanted you wanted to figure out ways to make as a veterinarian practice better so that my patients when I worked with them they were as comfortable as they could be in that situation. And then also helping my owners and their pets have a better relationship as well as realizing there's anxieties, that there's all kinds of things that you know that, you know, that they have a medical pathology with their anxiety-- to help those pets that have that as well. Sorry that was kind of long.

**Colleen Pelar:** No, that's absolutely and one of the things that you said in there really resonated with me because it was the experience I had too, which was when [00:03:00] I was taught some of this information about body language and behavior, it really opened my eyes. And because I was taught, you know, some of it's not intuitive and yet once your eyes are open, you can't unsee. Like once you start recognizing and understanding the meaning of things, you have a whole different view of the world and it changes your perspective on so many things which then changes the stories we tell about it. You know, the dogs aren't spiteful and angry and manipulative. Oh, they're frightened and anxious and you know, like all these pieces, but we don't do a great job of teaching that information as a culture, you know. Dogs are happy and easygoing everyone knows that not always. So that idea of really understanding what your animal is communicating to you requires some attention and active listening, not so much with your ears, but whole body listening, you [00:04:00] know, all attention on to what is trying to be said in this situation. So, can you tell me about a situation in which you had a client whose dog was very clearly, to you, saying one thing and at the owner really couldn't see it until you kind of helped open their eyes.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Yeah. I mean, this is pretty common. But one client I had had a new pet that they had adopted. It was a small pet and so it was easy to, you know, physically manipulate or go after, so they thought ... So this is what's interesting the dog does like to be near them; the dog just really doesn't like to be touched if that makes sense.

**Colleen Pelar:** Oh, that makes total sense.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** He's not a dog who wants a lot of touching. There was a couple times at the dog had snapped at them. One time bit, broke skin; one time did not. I think because the dog has [00:05:00] had bitten, the owner was a little more like, "Maybe I need to be a little more cautious." But they would reach over and the dog is like, he's low to the ground, his eyes are as wide as they can be, he's turning away, he's under a table and the person is still approaching. So I started intervening because I didn't want the person to be hurt obviously when I was in the appointment, but even when I was there talking to them about Body Language, they still at the beginning couldn't see it. But after we were done then they were kind of like, "Oh, okay." They started changing. I'm like, "Okay, don't reach over. Wait till he comes to you. Reach under. If he's under something, he's saying 'No, thank you.'" And even talking to them like when I was tossing him treats he would take food from me, but I never touched him because and I explained to them he's okay with being near me. But he's still not [00:06:00] okay with me touching him, So after a little while I was going to try, because he did start approaching me and was eating freely, and we were going to try to see if I could do a physical exam, but I'm in their home. He had seen his primary-care veterinarian. So it wasn't I mean, then I can look visually and see a lot of things but I wanted to listen to his heart. I was talking them through it. "Okay. He's leaning away. His eyes. He won't. He stopped eating. This isn't worth doing this." Because I knew he'd bitten in the past. Of course, I don't want to be bit and I think see he's not comfortable and this isn't an emergency. We don't need to finish this part of the appointment, you know, we can work on that later. Because he has some issues with going the primary care of that but then we talked about things we could use medication and stuff to help that but it was when I

first was there but the good news was I'm sitting there thinking, okay, this dog has bitten them or had two bites because I still count even if they don't break skin. To [00:07:00] me, if teeth go on skin, that's a bite.

**Colleen Pelar:** I agree.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Because I think people dance around. so that means that could happen. so I thought but I thought oh my gosh this dog like, He didn't bite obviously. He did not bite during the appointment, but he was showing signs. I'm like, oh this dog shows so much that they can avoid this. Like they had to really have pushed him and they, you know, not that they were doing ... They just with their physical space and invading their space. When it happened was they were trying to put on his collar and they went right towards his face. And that's the time. And he was under something and they went after him. So we talked about different approaches for that, but there was a case where if I wouldn't have been able to educate them about that, they would have they would have gotten in more trouble because they would have continued to not see it but the good news was this dog, not all dogs, but [00:08:00] this dog was very clear to me what he didn't want and he was very tolerant of them and with other people. Now when people come to visit, it's a much better situation because they have rules. You know, this is when this dog is telling you he wants attention and or he wants you to physically touch him. And this is when he doesn't. And the problem with him is he's very cute and small and he's cool and his I don't want to say his name but he has a like his name, but it's a dog that it's hard for someone not to go pick up. I think a lot of small dogs get in that trouble and they're like, "oh dogs love me" and then they come up to him and they and then he's not happy because they're frightening him with how they're doing things. Plus, you know, the way we approach dogs in general, everyone comes at them straight on and puts their hand right out. And if someone did, if I walk straight up to you [00:09:00] and grabbed your face, and I've never met you before-- even if I even know you--you'd be like, "What are you doing, Laurie?" But people just ... I didn't know those things either before so I would have done the same, probably would've done the same stuff because culturally that's what you do when you greet a dog or at least that's what we're taught.

Then I had another case where I did a same thing. It was a, it was a young puppy and by showing them because I take, you know, showing them the body language, the pictures and I send videos helping them see, you know, this puppy was very fearful. And they were approaching the dog and they weren't respecting, expecting the children, like the dog was under the table, the kids were right in its face, you know, and then that's when a bite happened. Fortunately it wasn't something that caused any injury but it was very clear that the dog wasn't okay with his body language. And then after teaching them, you know, they changed how they were approaching. And the puppy was saved. He's [00:10:00] still, he's in his home. Their last report is things are doing great. I mean there was an astute veterinarian that he was working with that, you know, saw and heard some issues at the first puppy exam and then recommended that they come, you know, come see someone to help. A veterinarian that works with behavior to help them to make sure you know just to look at the situation. And you know, it was it was simple things that you know that they

didn't realize you know that being able to tell them and watch and see in their environment how they interacted. I looked at the place and looked at the home, you know, I could see, "okay, well, here's the spot where he goes." So, you know you make a kid-free zone. I was talking to Julie Smith an "alone zone" instead of sometimes if you say kid-free that might sound kind of not so nice to the kid, but if you're like, you know, "the puppy is in his alone zone right now." When he's there that's alone zone. He's saying I want to be alone. And they can still want to be with [00:11:00] you but not want to be restrained or touched. Anyway, sorry I went off on a tangent.

**Colleen Pelar:** It's all behavior. And that's what we talk about here. So let's turn it now to people. So from the idea of that we want to interact with others in the way they want to be interacted with. One thing that's very interesting to me about body language and behaviors that is all driven by the limbic system. So how we're feeling inside affects how we present ourselves outside and so we're not thinking "I feel afraid so I will make myself smaller and turn away," but when we do we do. So those pieces drive it. So at work from the perspective of really understanding each other, what are what are some of your tips for really being able to do this between people?

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** I'm better with animals.

**Colleen Pelar:** Aren't we all?

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** So, tips ... I'm not as good at it with people even though you kind of sort of have to be to do it. I've learned, [00:12:00] you know to kind of try to pay attention to what I'm seeing with the person. If I say a word or I say something and I see their body stiffen or if they cross their arms, I try to watch so I go "Ooh, okay. I've gone somewhere that I need to be aware of." And then I stop. So I try to pay attention to what when I'm talking about something the body language of the person and look at what they're doing. Sometimes if I feel like there's something, after I give a recommendation, I'll say you know, "how does that make you feel" or "are you okay with that" or "would you be willing" so that there is an opportunity for them to express whatever they're feeling and listen to what they have to say. So I guess my tips would be you know, look try to be aware of their body language. Looking for them stiffening up. Or [00:13:00] if I start to see, and I don't even know how to explain this, but if I start to see I'm going down an emotional thing. Like I really listen for things with if they start going on to something personal, which will happen when I go into home consult. Then I try to be very aware of this, like because sometimes you know, I have to talk about hard things, especially when you're talking about aggression cases. It might not be the point to talk about, maybe I'll never bring up that that dog leaves the home in that moment because I'm listening for them. Or even like medication, I was with a client and we were talking about medication to manage the situation if the behavior modification is at work because it can help us and how do you feel about that? And she quickly was like, "Oh that's wrong. And I wouldn't do that to my child" like so I listened to what she was saying. I went, "Okay, that's off the table." That doesn't mean I wouldn't have ever brought it up later. But at that moment that was not a time to [00:14:00] talk to her about that because she's thinking, "I wouldn't medicate my child. How dare you bring up

medication about my dog?" If I would have kept trying to be like, "Oh but medicine is the only thing that we can do," she would have shut down. She wouldn't have heard. even if I gave her all my best arguments for why this would be she would not have heard it in that moment. If that makes sense.

**Colleen Pelar:** That makes total sense. It's a tricky spot, isn't it? That balancing act because you want to be able to continue the conversation and when people feel like we're refuting them and bumping up against them, they're not listening anymore. So it is it is challenging I think because it's always balancing as you go along." Is this a good time? Is this not a good time? Where can we go with this?" And people have so much going on inside their heads. We don't know what all the contexts are. So when she's saying, "I would never use [00:15:00] medication. I would never use it even for my child. But you know, I'm definitely not going to be doing this." There's a whole family history behind her of other experiences that we don't know. We don't know what happened that makes her feel so passionately about this for a tool that you know has worked very well for many, many, many dogs and possibly hers in the future.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Yeah, and the other thing that I have also learned is to try to tell people, I really try, as far as my listening, to I mean I truly when I talk to my clients or even anyone I'm like, "I want to know what's going on." So there's no judgment. I'm very conscious when I'm listening that I want them to feel comfortable in sharing everything because if they feel like they're going to be judged and not listen ... Like I want to present I'm here to listen to you without judgment because I want them to be able to tell me everything because it gives me a perspective from where they're coming from and it helps me help them and their pet. If [00:16:00] I don't know what was happening really when the dog did the thing they didn't like. You know when they're doing things I'm not aware of it's not that I'm gonna judge them, but I can say "Okay, instead of A, you know, instead of doing this when he does that, we can do B," but there's no judgment. So I would say, you know another tip for people as when you're trying to when you're having difficult conversations to really try to, even if someone says something that pulls emotion in you, to try very hard not to react to it like, "oh my God, I can't believe that happened."

**Colleen Pelar:** "That's the worst idea! We can't do that!"

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Right. That's something I'd really try to work on because it's sometimes people say things you're like, "I don't ... I didn't expect that." It's just to try to stay calm. I don't know if that helps with listening,

**Colleen Pelar:** I think it does.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** But I really try to help people know that they can freely tell me, you know, whatever's going [00:17:00] on. I know like I mean, I'm a mom with three kids. I try to do my best every day, you know with positive reinforcement even with them, but I get that sometimes you lose your temper. We're human. I mean no one's perfect. I want my clients to know that I need to know and want to know everything that's going on. Answer

honestly, and no, you're not going to be judged because I get it, you know, and it'll help me help you and your pet.

**Colleen Pelar:** Yeah. Have you read Rise VanFleet's *The Human Half of Dog Training*?

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** I have not but I need to.

**Colleen Pelar:** It's all of the things you just said, so maybe you don't need to. It's very interesting because it's about tackling conversations in a in ways that don't make the other person feel defensive and opening things up so that we can all move toward the shared goal of making situations better. And I think that there's a lot of stuff that can be really helpful for people at work in work conversations because again a question like, you know, "Why didn't you do the blood draw?" is more likely to make somebody crazy [00:18:00] than "Boy, it seems like a lot going on today. What things can I help with? Where are things going wrong?" And it's an interesting challenge for us to be aware of how we affect other people with some of the questions we ask and the body language we use when we're asking them and we want people to feel open to tell us everything that's going on.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Right and I also have found that through learning. I don't know if your listeners will, but the more I learned about canine body language and communication the more I'm like doesn't matter if you're a dog or a cat or a horse or a pig. We all can benefit from these concepts, so it's maybe I'm even getting more interested in the human side of communication. I want to learn more there so that I can be a better consultant and coach or you know for my clients because I need to help them and we need to be a [00:19:00] team and if I am not able to communicate with them or it's not going to work. They're not going to follow up. and you know, it also helps yourself, you know, behavior is hard work because a lot of times we're dealing with some hard stuff. you know, when there are some things I can't control but I just want to know that I've done my best job to help them because like you said, there's a whole backstory that I may not know and it may not have anything to do with me. It's just where they are in their life and all the other things that are going on and this is something they just can't, they can't do but. I do think you know, the more people look at their pets and learn about, you know, canine and feline communication, they can also, I'm not saying go around and train your husband or your children, but it's the still the same thing.

**Colleen Pelar:** Absolutely. That's why I do what I do now. I mean I started as a dog trainer and then I started realizing, "Oh if I want to change this dog's behavior, I need to change [00:20:00] these humans' behavior. Oh, I better learn how to deal with people." Oh, so it was really interesting that it's become this completely obvious progression when I look back on it, but at the time all of the pieces were a little bit of a surprise. I need to learn how to have conversations more tactfully. I need to learn how to identify what the underlying issues are that they're not saying. I need to recognize that there is an issue that they're not saying. So it's all this fascinating, fascinating behavior pieces because I'm a behavior nerd.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Yeah. And listening. Another thing will be interesting to me is when I if I have a couple. You know if there's a couple in the household and sometimes you can tell two people are two opposite pages. And that's really hard. That's not a very good sign for me and helping the dog if the people are on two different two different things, but it's important to know that because then you're like ...

**Colleen Pelar:** It's very important.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** "Okay, [00:21:00] I have a bigger challenge." And I would think even in the work environment if, you know, if you got two people and two opposite pages, you've got to say "Okay, what common ground? What's the deal breaker for you? What's the deal breaker for you? What is our common goal?" And figure out a way to move towards the common goal, whatever that might be. So I think that would be another tip as if you're you know in a situation and work where you have a problem going on between people to try to figure out, "Okay, what do we all agree on? We all want, I don't know, the appointments to go more efficient. Okay, what are your ideas? What are your ideas?" Focus on our common goal instead of "she does this" or "he does that." Those two people probably will feel better if they feel heard like if they really get a chance to feel heard and let them say what they need to say. Then it might be easier to find [00:22:00] that compromise or that common goal and they're like, okay, maybe you know, I can do this better and she can do that better and appointments move faster. But everyone gets taken care of. I'm not in a clinic right now. I mean, I've been in the past where I have multiple people, you know, but then as the supervisor or the boss, maybe if you don't listen to if you don't listen to both people and help work toward the common goal, you might not be aware, "oh, geez Susie has ... I'm expecting her to do ten things. She can't possibly do that. So we need to help her here." It's not that Susie is bad or lazy where people say, "Oh she just needs to work faster." If you don't sit there and ask and hear from Susie, you don't know what to do to help everyone go to the common goal, which would be maybe okay, we get through appointments faster, but everything still gets done. And that still helps because clients don't want to or the dog doesn't [00:23:00] want to sit there all day either so it helps everybody.

**Colleen Pelar:** It does help everybody. And really giving people the chance to say everything that's on their mind before we leap in with the, "well, here's what we really need to do" kind of thing because we're prone to giving advice before we've actually heard people out.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Yes.

**Colleen Pelar:** And it's usually better to not even give the advice but to get the people to come up with the advice on their own. To ask questions that lead them to come up with a suggestion or solution that would work for them and then they have ownership of it and we're like, "Yeah, that's great. And what about maybe this little piece added on top? What do you think?"

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** And that's something I'm trying to do more of. To help people, like you said, I mean and even think about what their animals control, to feel like you have control of something is reinforcing. It makes a person feel better. You know, so someone thinks, "I solved this problem on my own" versus "I had to have someone [00:24:00] tell me what to do." You're always gonna have better feeling, I would think, between the person that was getting the advice if they feel like they're asking for it versus being told you need to do this or you need to do that.

**Colleen Pelar:** Yeah, it's an interesting piece of how having a sense of control really affects happiness levels and we see that in animals all the time.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Yes, and that goes to but we don't think of it. Giving them a choice in the matter helps a lot.

**Colleen Pelar:** And it plays out big at work too like if you feel like here are the things that need to get done, but I can choose how they get done or when they get done or what the order is or you know, then people feel better about it rather than when they're feeling like someone's telling me all the time.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** It's hard but it's hard to do like as a mom, I haven't thought of this, getting ready my first to go to college and it's very hard to not be like, "You have to do this. You have to do that. You have to do this." And I'm trying really hard [00:25:00] to be more like, for example, there's something she needs to do this before a certain date and I'm like, "well, why don't you put it in your calendar to remind you?" Because I know because for her, and for all of us, if a date is far away, it's like "I got plenty of time to do it." So then I brought it up again. She's like "Okay, I'm gonna do it this weekend." So then I walked in there and I was like, "Okay, are you ready to write? Are you ready to do what you're supposed to do?" And she got, "I told you I would do it. You know, I'll do it Sunday." And I had to stop and go okay, and I just went, "You know what? You got this. I just was I was just giving you a friendly reminder." because I know I'm not gonna be able to do that soon, but it's still the point of she does need to take ownership. She does need to learn how to manage time. I'm trying to think, okay, I'll step back and be more of a coach and say. "Here's a suggestion. This is what helps me when I have to manage." I showed her my calendar of all of [00:26:00] their stuff and my stuff and I'm like, this is what I use because I couldn't do this without my calendar. I couldn't know and I'm like in your right now, you know, you're gonna start having papers and things you want to gonna do and I'm like, I have my lunch written down. I have things I'm doing socially so that if someone asked me to do something and if I see 20 different colored dots on my Google Calendar, I'm like "Next week." But you know, but I can't make her. So I try to do the same thing, with them and trying to hopefully I'll be able to do that with the clients and even with our pet, you know animals as we're doing with cooperative care, you know, like teaching them a skill. There's a lot of it with the chin rest or holding their paw or whatever so that if they can't do it in the moment, then you know that what you're asking is too much in the exam. So like if you train your dog to put his chin on your lap as the vet's doing an exam and he goes to do something [00:27:00] or she goes to do something in the dog removes it, that's the dog telling you, okay,

something about that is too much. It's not the dog being bad. I think that helps dogs have a choice because it's like okay, that's too much then as the veterinarian you could be like, okay, can I change something about what I'm doing? Can we add a different food? Can I do something or is it time for chemical restraint, meaning I got to do something that this dog can't tolerate so I'm not going to put four people to hold him down while I force him through it. Then you're like, "Okay, he's telling me this is too much. We've tried X, Y, and Z, okay. You know owners, what do you think about you know, some chemical restraints we can get this final thing done and he won't be the wiser?" Quick injection. Sleep you go. get it done. Wake up and you go home. But I do think giving animals choices in exams, well it would be helpful to for that.

**Colleen Pelar:** We all like choices. It matters so much [00:28:00] of whether or not we feel like we have any control in the situation that that hugely affects happiness levels and cooperation levels. So it's been a really interesting discussion of really being in tune with those that we're interacting with and it's not always easy because we have a million thoughts going on in our heads to so we're saying and thinking and doing things that they have no idea about and same is happening in reverse and we're all trying to meet in the middle and have a shared understanding of what actually occurred. Not always as easy as we think. So one of the questions I really love to ask is a perspective question again, you have a lab golden mix named Wesler. How would Wesler describe you if he could use words?

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** If he could use words? Oh, jeez. How would he describe me? I think he would describe me as an intermittent treat [00:29:00] dispenser, Busy. I would say would be loyal, concerned about others, expects a lot expects a lot, forgiving and I hope you would think I would be fun.

**Colleen Pelar:** it sounds like a great description for a co-worker in most cases someone who's busy, loyal, concerned about others, expects a lot and is forgiving and fun. I mean that I would like to work with people like that. because it is a matter of balancing, you know expectations. We're gonna get good stuff done, but we're going to have fun doing it. And it should be well done. So I think I think he's described a very nice coworker for the world and if we could all just try to be as good as Wesler thinks you are that would be good for us. So could you tell our listeners [00:30:00] how they could reach you and learn more about your business?

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Okay, they can go to my website which is [www.protectthebond.com](http://www.protectthebond.com). They could also search me on Facebook. It's Laurie Schulze, S-C-H-U-L-Z-E and then the comma, DVM and they can go there and find ways to message or you know a phone number if they're in the Columbus area, you know if they're interested in a consult or if they have a question or a concern.

**Colleen Pelar:** I apologize. I just realized I mispronounced your last name. I said Schulz as opposed to Schulze.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Happens all the time.

**Colleen Pelar:** I'm sure it does, but I try not to do it. My apologies. Thanks so much for joining us today. I really appreciate that.

**Laurie Schulze, DVM:** Thanks for having me. It was fun.

**Colleen Pelar:** So anyone listening if you thought this was a useful conversation that could help you at work, could you please share this with any of [00:31:00] your friends who are animal-care professionals just passing the word around about behavior and how we can all be better at work can really change the world.