



## **“Hi! My name is ‘No, No, Bad Dog!’”**

There are 3 things we must give our dogs in order to have a well behaved and content companion: physical exercise, mental stimulation, and an effective standard of communication. Unfortunately, many owners just assume their dog came out of the womb knowing all sorts of English (or Spanish, or German, or whatever language the owner happens to speak) words and as a result, their communication is anything but effective. Instead of taking the time to go through a learning process and teach the dog specific behaviors (that can eventually become associated with specific words/commands), owners spend much of their time getting frustrated and screaming at their confused pooch. We must consider our dogs as ESL students and see the world from their point of view.

Imagine if while in class, I said to you, “Hlala phansi!” Then, when you just stood there, I started saying “Hlala phansi!” over and over again, getting frustrated, raising my voice, and pointing at your butt? And when you still didn’t respond correctly to my request, I started yanking on your necklace or shoving you? “What’s the matter with you, why won’t you sit down? Oh! You don’t speak Zulu?”

Seriously, this all too frequent scenario is just too silly for words.

It is a tragedy that so many dogs are punished and abused because their owners think they are so smart. How many times have you heard someone say to their dog, “You know better than that!”? Well, chances are they really don’t know any better. By not taking the time to teach our dogs what we want, it’s like we are keeping our desires a secret and as a result, the dogs are thoroughly confused. So many times, our dogs seemingly understand what we are saying because they are expert observers of our behavior and spend *a lot* of time watching us and deciphering our behaviors and schedules. As a result, owners mistakenly assume the dogs understand spoken language, when in fact they are much more likely responding to your body language, tone, volume, and the behaviors they have watched you do over and over again every day, i.e.: walking towards the refrigerator, picking up the leash, putting on your tennis shoes as opposed to your work shoes, etc.

Until you have gone through an actual learning process with your dog and taken the time to teach him specific behaviors that are associated with specific commands, you *must not* depend on language. Unless you are *100%* sure that your dog is fluent in the actual word you are saying, you must not assume he has any idea what you are talking about. And in the meantime, please (your dog and I are begging you), do not say the word over and over again a hundred times while pointing at their butt and for heaven’s sake, don’t scream it!