

*Home

*Sitemap

*SEARCH THE SITE

*Horse History

*Horseman Tips

*Horsemanship

*Amazing Horse Hoof

*Horse Anatomy Pictures

*Rope Halters

My Random Horse

Thoughts

*Tying A Horse

*Bosal/Hackamores

*Bad Horsemanship

*Misc Horse Info

*Trailer Loading

*Training Videos

*Hobbles

*Horse Articles

*Health and Medical Info

Horse & Rider Fear

Opposition Reflex

*Answers to Questions

*Cowboy Wisdom

*Cookie Recipe for Horses

*Horse Jokes

*Cowboy Weather

*Sites and Links

A Horse's Prayer



Horse's love it when their owner's understand them.

Horsemanship is about the horse teaching you about yourself.



Discussing Horse and Rider Fear:

This is one of the biggest problems in horsemanship today. Fear of horses also known as **Hippophobia**. I am going to try and address the many ways that horse fear appears and how it affects the horse and your relationship with your horse. This is such a huge and all encompassing topic, but I will try to cover it briefly. The links I put on this page are ones that I think would be helpful if you read them and improved you understanding of this critical topic. This page is long and it may take some time, but if you learn one thing you will have grown in your Horsemanship and that is good for the Horse.



Fear and Love cannot occupy the same space at the same time. You cannot love if you fear what you love. People do not get nervous around chocolate cake. Understanding horse fear and human fear are very different. Humans do NOT fear their horse will eat them; however, a horse does fear they will be killed and eaten. In reality, a horse's fear is much more valid than human fear. However, as humans we cannot help think we are the center of the universe and we are always more important than all other animals.

*Photos Rick and Horses

Clinics on Request

*Contact Rick



**Think Like A Horse
By: Rick Gore**

[Move to top of page](#)

Question: What are the only two things Horses are scared of?

Answer: Horses fear two things – things that move and things that do not move.

It is their nature of being a horse – remember this the next time you get upset with your horse for spooking.

People who are about to die are immobilized by fear. **A person who is facing death will not worry about tomorrow.** We must not forget that fear is not always negative. Fear forces us to be more aware, alert and to examine things more closely which enables us to make better decisions and live longer. That is as long as we can reason and understand things so we can make intelligent decisions. However, we have to be aware that the human mind is a powerful thing. If we imagine something is happening, the mind will not know the difference. If you focus on fear too much then you will be focused on other more important things like staying alive or controlling what you do. Fear is a waste of energy and puts you worrying about the future rather than the now or present. Love, compassion, and courage is the opposite of fear. **Fear affects and prevents love.** Fear not only from you but from others also trains your horse. So letting other people handle or be around your horse trains your horse. Therefore, if others show fear, move away, jump and act spooky around your horse, then your horse learns from them and is taught bad lessons. Your horse can learn to be afraid of fear and he may associate fear with people and that sets the horse up to fail over and over again.

A good answer to fear is knowledge and understanding. Balancing fear with reason is a good start. It does not matter if it is a fear of spiders, heights, darkness, or horses. All fear causes more issues than just the fear. Notice in the picture above that directions to love and fear are in opposite directions. Far too often, I see struggling horse owners who are scared of their horse and then try to love their horse. Not only do they fail but their horse fails as well.

Fear is an instinct which helps us survive - it should not prevent us from living

Fight or Flight Response to Fear

This is a fascinating topic to me. Both in the military and in police work the knowledge of this response system is critical to survival.

Superman, super human, unbelievable strength and other words are often used to describe this response. Briefly, when we, as humans, perceive a severe or extreme threat, this fight or flight response kicks into action automatically. We can't stop it and we can't prevent these automatic responses from happening.

Things that go into action when faced with extreme fear is the heart rate jumps to over 200 BPM, this to pump large amounts of oxygen rich blood to our major muscles, anticipating our need to fight or run (flight). Our vision narrows so we can focus on the threat, our hearing shuts down to prevent loud or distracting sounds, blood is blocked off from non-essential body parts and functions like fingers and toes, the digestive system stops working since it is not essential to surviving, endorphins and chemicals are dumped into the body to help in different areas such as strength, power, speed, vision, hearing, reflexes and reactions. Sometime the bladder or intestines void (dump) all in an involuntary instant (Hence the old saying: He got the poop scared out of him). All of this is designed to increase your chances to survive.

Although this system is very effective and efficient, it has its draw backs. Slowing down, moving back to normal speed, getting rid of all the hormones, chemicals and adrenalin that is now in the system and not being used.

When this response kicks in it prevents some of the other body functions. You lose dexterity, lose hearing, lose vision and lose difficult and complex thinking ability, blood is redirected to large muscle groups and everything is re-directed to fight or flight functions used to help you survive.

Side Note: Often after cops are in a shooting, a high risk incident which triggers the Fight or Flight, they will lock onto the threat and will not hear other cops and cannot see anything but the bad guy or threat, since their hearing has shut down (auditory exclusion) and their eyes lock on the threat (loss of peripheral vision), they may appear to be locking in a trance. So cops are actually trained to approach cops, who were just in a shooting, from the rear and place their hands on the officers so not to startle the officer and to let him know others are present, since they may not have the ability to hear or see them. Being aware of these automatic responses should make you more aware and perhaps enable you to notice what you do when you get scared and if you focus on this you can change, modify or control your actions.

The best bad example I see is the stupid and unreasonable thing called "**The Emergency Dismount**". Kids and adults are being taught that when in trouble or scared on a horse, you should do an Emergency Dismount (jump off and abandon the horse). The idiot that thought this up **was not** a horseman and did not have a clue about understanding horses and the way they learn and think. This *suicide procedure* is a sure fire way to teach a horse to run off, scare you and learn how to get you off their back. This brainless dismount is not any different than jumping off a horse that lies down or getting off a horse that starts pawing, or jumping off a horse that rears, **listen carefully**, if you get off a horse when a horse does something, you teach a horse when it repeats that behavior, you will get off of him. This is such a basic concept if you understand that release teaches horses. Release of pressure tells a horse, whatever it was doing when it received the release that was the right answer to get release. Hence, if you only get off your horse when he stops and stands still, the horse learns to stop and stand still when you get off him. If you get on your horse and allow him to walk off he learns to walk off when you get on him.

When people don't understand horses and listen to what is being taught and repeated in the horse world, "Show the horse who is boss" carp, they can triggered a horses genetic survival instinct and they wonder why the horse reacted, reared, ran off, got scared or if trapped and cannot run why it attacked and went into fight mode. How can humans expect to turn fear into confidence if they only know how to push, be tough and always pushing a horse? Being tough, hard, and rough is preached but not many explain the other parts to understanding and communicating with horses. It is also our nature as humans, Predators, that when we get scared of fearful, we get aggressive or attack. Any idiot can lock a horse up, put a chain on it's nose, beat it and show it who is boss. It takes a horseman to use feel, timing and respect in order to gain a willing and reliable horse that is treated fair and given a good horse life.

As stupid humans we may feel anxious or fearful but we have the ability to evaluate, look at things from different positions, we have greater reasoning ability and can deal with our fear without going in to an involuntary instinctual response mode. A horse only knows how to be a horse, his instinctual responses is what keeps him alive, it is genetic and implanted deep within the horse, it is not wrong and it is not mean, it is pure survival. Understand that, accept that and your horse will know that know.

Understanding the flight or fight concept and your body's response to fear will help you do better in many ways. Not only will it help you to better understand what you are going through, it will also help you understand what your horse goes through when it is scared. Similar things take place in a horse when they are pushed into *flight or fight* or when their automatic response system is triggered. I have put a link below to good page that explains this **Fight or Flight response system** in more detail and shows how complex this system is and yet how fast and efficient it goes into action and how well it works.

[Detail Information about Fight or Flight](#)

Drowning Victim Fear Compared to Horse Fear

I worked as a Lifeguard many years ago while stationed in Korea. The pool I worked at had many Koreans and Americans, so there was a language barrier on my end since I did not speak Korean. During my time there, I made several rescues. After a few, I learned that giving directions and trying to communicate did not do much good. Much like talking English to a horse, it really does not matter what you say, the horse does not speak English. Another thing that became very clear is when someone is fighting for their life and thinks they are about to die, they do not care what you have to say. Once their flight and fight response kicks in - they care about one thing, *Not drowning*. So I could talk until I was blue in the face, or until they were blue in the face (No pun :), and they did not care, they wanted something or someone to grab onto and save them. Their focus was clear - **staying alive and Survival**.

In Lifeguard training they have many examples of Lifeguards that were killed or drowned during rescues. This is very common, when a drowning victim thinks they are going to die, they fight and grab and will drag, choke or knock out their rescuer. Not intentional, not being mean, not being stupid, they are just trying to stay alive and if they hurt or kill you in that effort, it is not intentional or personal. The same is true with horses. When they want to live or think they may die, they will do things that may hurt or kill you. This is why it is a good idea not to get yourself or your horse into that situation.

As a Lifeguard I would defuse the victim's ability to control the situation by doing an approved technique called an underwater approach, going underwater, grabbing the victims legs from underwater, pulling the victim underwater, with them facing away from me, so I could grab them from behind, gain control of them and prevent them from hurting, grabbing or drowning me, all of this so I could save them. Now some may say that what I did was mean, or how cruel to pull a drowning victim underwater when they are fighting for the life or that I was not very fair and probably scared the crap out of them. I say, who cares. If I have to scare you to save you, then I will scare you for your own good so I can save you. Again, this should sound a lot like what I say about horses.

The same is true with horses. People want to love them and help them, but they do not want to scare them or be mean to them or do something that will help them, for fear of not being nice, caring, or loving. ***I say Horse Pucky***. Get over it, you must be willing to do things for the good of the horse. It may appear mean or unfair, but if it makes the horse safer and gives the horse a better life and keeps you safe so you can provide care and a home for the horse, ***then DO IT and stop whining about how hard it is or how you don't want to be mean***.

The things that are important here are horses and people will not listen, can't listen or do not want to listen when scared or fighting for their life. Communication suffers when fear is involved. Your communication with your horse suffers when you are scared. When you focus on yourself and your fear, and your safety and your wants, you abandon your horse. That is NOT fair to the horse and it sets you both up to fail.

Expecting a horse not to get scared is like asking water not to be wet.

An interesting little study was done years ago. It dealt with eyes/pupils dilating when looking at things that make you happy or excited. In this study, they found that men and women eyes dilated differently. Save the hate mail, if you want to see this as sexist send them the mail, I am just passing this on to make a point.. In this study they found that the eyes of males dilated when they looked at pictures of naked women (maybe women in bikinis but not sure). However, the eyes of women dilated when they looked at pictures of babies. Therefore, this is just another study that proves men and women are different, they think differently and see things differently. So why do eyes dilate, it is to allow more light in so the picture can clear, it is the body's way of helping to survive and see threats better. Eyes dilate when the heart rate increases since that could be a sign of fear or flight. So when looking at things that make you excited or happy, your heart rate increases and your eyes dilate.

Can you control this? No, it is an automatic system that occurs without your control.

[You can View the Study by Clicking Here](#)

If you want additional interesting information about the eye [Click Here](#)

Another example of panic and fear where communication shuts down is with bees and wasp. Every see a child or an adult stumble into a wasp nest and get attacked or swarmed, they panic, they run, they scream, will trip, fall, roll, run into things and they go into fight or flight mode and since they can't fight the wasp, so they run (flight). Trying to talk or give direction to someone in this situation will NOT work. In fact, if you get in the way, you are likely to get run over, knocked down or knocked out. And then people would be calling you a stupid human or a spooky human or a human with bad breeding, or **some other dumb label that would make no sense**. When in fact a person doing this is just doing what is normal and is trying to survive. How can people not see the similarities between this situation and a horse that is pushed too fast or forced into his flight or fight response? Better yet, next time you see a person in this situation, try putting a chain in the human's mouth and start yanking and pulling on it and see how that works out. The next time someone shoe catches on fire try and tell them they are being bad and need to listen. How can no one see that using PAIN (bits or spurs) in these situations cannot make things better?

Horsemanship is thinking, horsemanship is about understanding and seeing things from a horse's point of view.

These survival instincts may change in the future as more horses are being bred in captivity and domesticated. During the domestication of the horse, man has decided breeding. This took out the survival needs factor and replaced it with the looks and image factor. This means it is no longer "the survival of the fittest," but now the survival of the breed, color or looks that suit the human's best. In addition, the trend of locking up horses and keeping them alone is changing horses. People are taking away the ability of horses to learn from other horses. Herd behavior is being lost and not being passed on and in the end the horses will pay.

Here is a link to [Julie Goodnight's answer to a question about fear](#). Read my take below before you visit the link and read her answer.

Ohhhhh Rick, Julie Goodnight, she is so good she can ride bridleless in reining. Save it people, she may be able to ride backwards while eating dinner, I am not talking about her riding, I am talking about her answer. Read her answer to fear, after she pumps her books and videos that will fix all the problems, she then goes into making the person feel good and tells all kinds of things that won't help her horse but it sure sounds good. Things like talk to a pastor, get counseling, maybe the mean husband is pressuring her, maybe she should take some lessons, maybe she should not ride Thoroughbreds since they are volatile and emotional (**Are you kidding me**), she just labeled an entire breed and gave every person with a TB a reason and excuse to mistrust and fear their horse. This is the crap that just irritates me. Of course her answer ends with information on how to get personal lessons from her - for a price (\$\$\$). Really? This is what women want, a bunch of feel good talk that gives you lots of options on spending money???? And people call me sexist when I call it like I see it and give a voice to the horse, but let another woman just "talk" nice, blame other things, tell you to go pray with your pastor for your horse issues and label an entire breed and suddenly she is so nice and helpful. This answer does not help the horse; it helps the person feel good and helps Julie's bank account.

I would really like one person, who gets this advice as a usable answer that helps them to let me know how this advice specifically helped you with your fear? Give me the secret I am missing. Don't tell me you got lessons or ordered her book, or just feel better after reading this, that is all temporary crap for you, explain what this answer said that helped you **get a result** from your horse?

I am not trying to pick on Julie, I am pointing out that fear can be justified, blamed or dealt with in different ways. I happen to think dealing with it head on and realizing that the fear is YOUR problem and not the horse's. If you do not get or accept that, then all the other crap is just crap.

The insecurity associated with a fear or fear of abandonment can ruin your relationships with your horse. Too many people (mostly women) want their horse to love them so much that they fear being mean, correcting or giving the horse discipline and direction. Little do they know they are sending a clear message to the horse that they **are not** strong leaders and that they should not be trusted or depended on. Since the horse will not follow a weak leader, these people ruin the relationship by trying to save it. This creates an unhealthy relationship for both the horse and the person who is scared and will only get more scared. And I mean scared of either the horse or scared to hurt the relationship with the horse. Fear is not productive and will lead to a path of danger, injury and failure.

Things I See People Do that is Caused by Fear:

Tie bags in stalls since they don't know how to work with the horse and sack out correctly

Avoid their horse in fearful situations

Only riding in an arena where they feel safe

Not riding with other riders

Not riding at all

Not wanting to spend time with their horse

Blaming the horse for their fears

Making excuses for the horse's fear like the wind, tractor, bag, birds, planes, cats, ditches, open areas, trees, small areas, fenced areas, non-fenced areas, big vehicles, loud vehicles, moving vehicles, windows, reflections, swinging doors, tarps, wood poles, white things, red things, moving bushes, fallen tree branches, water, moving water, bugs, stacked hay, bicycles, motorcycles, people walking, people running, and many others.

We cause what we try and prevent is the same as we attract what we fear.

Is Rider Fear Transferable to Horses?

The insecurity associated with a fear of abandonment (your horse will not love you) can ruin relationships with your horse. Too many want their horse to love them so much, they fear being mean, stern or correcting and giving the horse discipline and or direction. Little do these people know they are sending a clear message to the horse that they are not strong leaders and that they should not be trusted or depended on in a crisis? Since the horse will not follow a weak leader these people ruin the relationship by trying to save and protect it. A horse does not have a choice about wanting a strong leader, it is in their DNA and is instinctual.

If you can make fear your friend you can deal with it more effectively. If you understand that fear is useful and helps you if you control it and use it. There is no doubt that Horses feel your fear. They do NOT smell it - they feel, see fear and hear it in your voice? When a rider gets scared, they tense up, their heart rate goes up, their response system kicks in, they pull or

squeeze the reins, they clutch or grip tightly with their legs and often lean forward, all conflicting cues and all confuse or put the horse on guard and makes the horse uneasy.

Learning is about understanding & knowledge and not just changing your behavior. Learning creates the potential to perform certain behaviors better because of experience or understanding. Recognizing your fear and the responses to fear will help you be aware and control those reactions and will help you gain confidence in yourself and your horse will gain confidence in you.

***Horse has more confidence in you = horse sees you as a leader
Horse sees you as leader = You have more confidence
You have more confidence = Your horse has more confidence in you.***

What a horse needs to hear and see from it's leader is the same thing we want from our horse. They want and need calm, focused and good direction. They need to know what to expect from us and to know we are consistent and fair. Horses find comfort and confidence in routine or in knowing what is going to happen before it happens. They need to develop habits and we help them get this by being consistent and always ready to help. We destroy this when we are scared, not focused, worried, unsure, guessing or trying and failing. The latter teaches the horse to see in us what we try and hide.

Being comfortable around horses is very important. Horses are always watching and learning so seeing you being comfortable and feeling safe sends a good message. If they see you as fearful, jumpy and always pushing them out of your space, they learn that you cannot be trusted and then they cannot be comfortable or feel safe around you. Remember: A horse is a reflection of you; they give back what they get.

I think fear causes people to be too aggressive sometime. Like the saying, make the wrong thing hard and right thing easy. Some may confuse making something hard is the same as punishment. This is a bad mistake. Punishment of a horse does not work and normally only destroys the relationship and makes the horse do behavior that is more dangerous. When thinking of making the wrong answer hard, think in more open terms helping the horse find all the wrong or undesirable answers, so you can help the horse find the more correct or right answer. By keeping pressure, making the horse uncomfortable you make the horse try things to find release of pressure. As the horse is looking for release, if you are doing it right, he will find the right answer and if your timing is right, you will release pressure so the horse understands what the right answer is. Too many just chase the crap out of horse and think that is showing the horse who is boss and that is making the wrong answers hard. That is only one part, the other part is helping and leading and showing the horse the right answer so you can release pressure and the horse can learn what the right answer is to get the pressure released or stopped.

Most people cannot do this in a round pen or on a lung line. If you are competent on the ground then you can transfer that competence when you are in the saddle. Everything in horsemanship is interconnected. You may think you can compartmentalize things but the horse knows. That is why trainers and gimmicks do not work. People wanting you to buy their videos of special equipment want you to think you can get success with a special soft rope. The soft rope is just one part of the equation. Knowing how to be soft, knowing how the rope moves, feel, timing, rhythm, release, not being too fast with the rope, not hurting the horse with the rope, not accidentally hitting the horse in the eye or ear with the rope, all of this is what makes the special soft rope work. Since all of this takes time, experience, failure, good horses teaching over the years and understanding of the horse, the special rope is just another rope. Of course if I tell you this I can't get you chasing success by paying 69 bucks for a 12 dollar rope. The slow way is the fast way with horses.

Your inability to be comfortable around horses sends off powerful negative and non-trusting emotions and I think horses know this and can feel this, much like people can tell if they are being stared at. If you get scared of a bee and panic, swat and run, the horse can't reason why you did it, it just sees what you are doing. It shows weakness, it shows lack of confidence, and it shows fear. If you step in a mud puddle and get mud on your pretty pink shoes and you get upset, mad, and angry or focus on your so called problem, all the negative energy, actions, reactions and behavior will send powerful messages to your horse. The more this is done the clearer the message becomes to the horse.

Here is the [Horse Fear and Human Fear study](#) I talk about sometime. You can view it by clicking on the previous link or just read it below.

Rider and Horse: Is Fear Transferable?

By Dierdre Healey

A University of Guelph researcher has found horses can sense when a rider is nervous and as a result will become nervous themselves.

Prof. Uta von Borstel, Department of Animal and Poultry Science, hooked up 53 pairs of riders and horses with heart monitors last summer at the International Student Riding Nations' Cup in Innisfil, Ont., and measured their heart rates during stressful situations.

About 25 per cent of all fatal sports injuries are related to horseback riding, and about a quarter of all horse-related injuries are due to the horse being scared, said von Borstel, who's been riding horses since she was a child.

"Horseback riding is one of the most dangerous sports you can do," she said. "Studies show that your chances of getting injured riding a horse are far higher than while riding a motorcycle because the horse's nerves can make it jump unpredictably. If we can do something to control horses and their reaction to fear, then we can reduce the number of accidents."

She conducted her research as a PhD student with Prof. Ian Duncan and Anna Kate Shoveller in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, Prof. Suzanne Millman in the Department of Population Medicine and Prof. Linda Keeling of the Swedish Agricultural University.

The heart rates of the riders and horses were used as an indicator of the level of fear they were experiencing during two fear-inducing tests.

For the first test, von Borstel told the riders she would be unexpectedly squirting the horses with a water gun to startle them. She said this caused the riders to become nervous because they didn't know when the horse was going to be squirted or how the horse would react.

Although the horses were never actually squirted with water, von Borstel found the heart rates of both the riders and the horses were higher than when they were measured in a comfortable situation.

The horses had no reason to be nervous, yet they were still nervous. They were sensing from the rider that something wasn't right." Does a nervous rider mean a nervous horse?

Whatever the horses were sensing, it was very subtle, she said.

There were no visible signs of the riders feeling nervous or tense. It may have been a slight tightening of the reins or their legs squeezing the horse a little harder. We aren't sure exactly what it was, but it was obvious the horses were quite tuned into the riders and how they were feeling.

For the second test, von Borstel had the riders and the horses approach an umbrella that was opening and closing, spurring fear in both.

During this test, both heart rates were mildly higher than they were in a comfortable setting, but the horses' heart rate was just as high as it was during the first test when only the riders were feeling nervous.

Although the umbrella was a strong stimulus for fear, von Borstel said both the riders and horses knew it was there. As a result, the riders were probably able to better control the situation and the horses' level of fear.

Most of the people who took part in the testing were experienced riders, and she found the more experience they had, the better they were able to control the horses' fear, particularly in the second test.

"Perhaps a more confident rider, who notices the horse is nervous, is able to control his or her own tension or nervousness."

She said this is promising for the purposes of her research because it means a rider can influence the level of fear a horse experiences.

“Riders could develop some relaxation techniques that would help them relax when they are feeling nervous. That might help break up the nervous cycle that occurs between rider and horse and help reduce the number of injuries and even deaths from horse-related accidents.”

Dierdre Healey, University of Guelph

[Here is an alternate link to this Study](#)

My issue with the below information about horse fear is it only addresses the horse, it does not address the person or the human factor such as experience, training, confidence and other factors of the "Stupid Human". Again, there is a belief that horses have problems; this is wrong, horse problems are caused by people. Still worth the read with lots of good information.

[Another good read about Horses, Fear and Behavior - Click Here](#)

[Do Humans have Senses that are Not being used?](#)

There have been several studies about if people can tell when they are being stared at. Do we stupid humans have senses that we don't use or don't know we are using? Mr. Rupert Sheldrake did a study about this staring issue and he got some pretty good results. You can view his study on ["The Sense of Being Stared At" here.](#)

Some schools of thought in Sniper training and this is being taught, is that you should not stare at your target too long. Some Snipers are being told to look away periodically so they do not unintentionally telegraph their presence to their target.

In the [Vietnam War](#), for you youngsters that was another useless and foolish war US politicians got us into, the so called enemy in this war was the Vietcong. It was reported that the Vietcong, who ate mainly rice and fish and were not big meat eaters, could actually smell the Americans at great distances. This has been reported because of the Americans diet of meat. Could it have been from the cigarette smoke or the lack of taking a bath? Who knows for sure, but we know dogs and horses can smell things up to a mile away. Can we humans do this as well? In addition, if we can, what kind of signals and messages do we send out, that we do not know or are unaware that we are sending? Since 80% of communication is non-verbal, what are we really saying to our horse without knowing it?

Do we stupid humans have what is called “Spidey sense?” That feeling when we know something is wrong and the hairs on back of neck stand up telling us something is wrong, but we can't be for sure. Is their other subconscious cues that warn us and change our actions and behavior and we don't know why?

Are people really aware of the messages they send? And if so, do they realize how the horse perceives the messages they send?

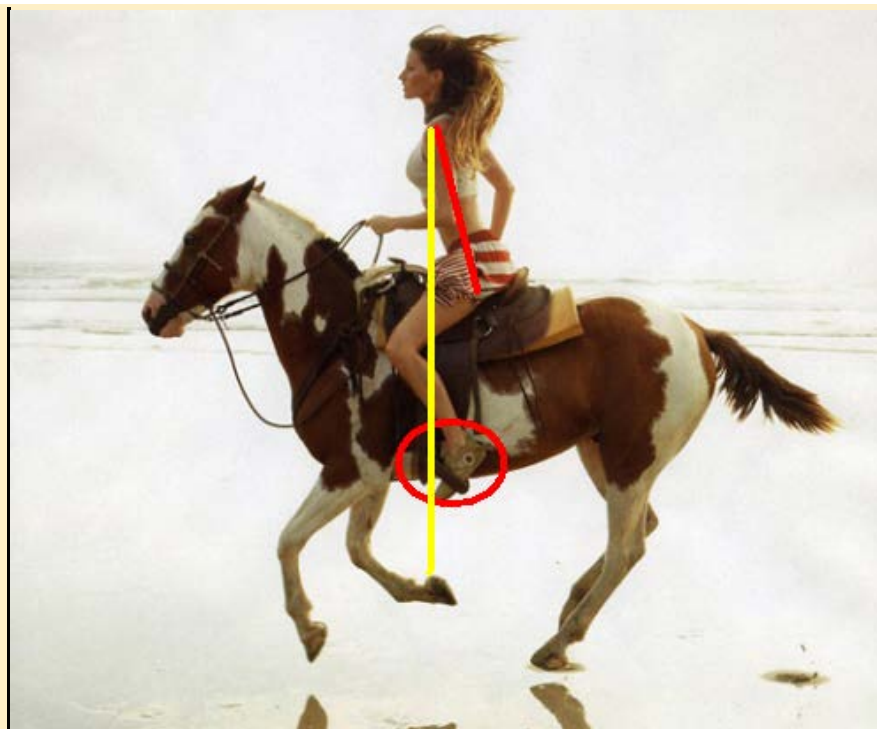
I know some women who are scared to death of spiders or mice and react loudly and with panic when they are near one. Then they react this way when a bee or wasp flies by them, then they act this way if an aggressive rooster comes by them, then they act scared if other horses come by them, then they act scared if the tractor drives by since they think it scares their horse, then they act scared if someone else uses or cracks a whip, then they get scared if another rider runs their horse by them, then they get scared if their horse gets scared and they get scared trying to control their horse during all this. Fear creating fear and the horse is watching.

Then these same people start trying to control everyone and everything to try and prevent their fear or prevent their horse's fear and when they fail, they get frustrated and mad. Then they loose patience with their horse, call their horse names like stupid, and blame the horse for not

listening. Then when their horse runs off, they will get a bigger bit since they get scared when their horse runs off and they feel out of control, so they think by getting a bigger more painful bit they will be safer. Then they wear a helmet so they will feel safer. Then they start doing things to avoid all things that make them fearful and they concentrate on avoiding all their fears. When all the time they are teaching the horse many bad lessons. The horse is always learning. These people are so busy **trying NOT to be scared**, to avoid their fear, to control their fear and they have no clue what they are teaching their horse. Moreover, they certainly cannot work on their horsemanship or their horse when all their efforts are focused on their fear.

Taking action to overcome fear. If you are scared to fall off a horse or slide out of the saddle due to poor balance, you can just be scared and always fear it or you take action to deal with it and remove that fear. You can work on your balance in other ways, you can exercise to get stronger legs and hips, you can do other things that require balance, like riding a bike or motorcycle, so you will develop your balance muscles, and you can ride your horse more to improve your balance, seat and confidence. Or you can remain scared, avoid riding, and justify the fear as being real. The choice is yours. The bigger problem that people miss with fear - it is all compounded with horses. Every thing is intermingled and connected in horsemanship. Nothing stands alone and you cannot isolate your fear.

Lets look at this rider in the picture below. At first look, she may look like she has a good seat and can ride a horse at a canter - upon closer look, notice the off-balance seat. Her pointed toes (off balance), the leaning forward of the back (off balance), the line from shoulder, straight down, should be almost in line with back, hips, ankles and head, but it is not. Also notice the way she is holding the reins. Palm up hold is wrong and gives not grip or power if needed. Reins coming from the horse's head need to be at the bottom of the hand with the other end at the top of hand and thumb. She is holding the reins wrong. If this horse stops or turns fast or jigs, she will lose her balance. That will cause her to try and use the reins for balance and pull them sideways and leaning to one side of the horse. The horse will see this as fear, as possibly think the rider is trying to pull the horse down. The does not know when a rider falls why? The horse normally only see someone trying to pull him down and a horse will not go down easy, so he will resist as much as he can part from fear and part from survival. Many people say heels down, but do not know the significance of this. When the heels are down it forces a deep seat, it shows control and confidence since rider instinct is to point the toes down (fetal position from fear). So inexperienced riders point toes unconsciously and are unconsciously off balance.



Let's talk about the fear of falling from poor balance. Every time you ride, this fear is present, since you are scared and you are worried, you cannot focus on your horse, you cannot focus on your soft hands, your directions, or your communication, you cannot focus on improving yourself or helping your horse - you can only focus on your fear of falling. So now, many other things suffer because of this one fear. Then because of this fear, your horse reacts differently, suddenly he is insecure, he gets nervous more and you get more nervous, soon neither of you has confidence in the other. The one problem 'fear of falling' is now a full-blown fear of many things that now encompasses lots of fear, confusion and unclear messages. Fear is crippling. Moreover, no book is going to fix it, no trainer, no super secret special gimmicks will help. What will help is understanding, confidence, experience, accepting it and overcoming it with knowledge, education and trust. Trust in yourself and trust in your Horse - **trust your horse and your horse will trust you.**

Some people watch things happen, others make things happen and others wonder what happened. I see Fear causing all three of these when dealing with horses. When you goals cannot be reached, you do not adjust the goals, you adjust your actions used to reach your goals.

The study about the fire hose and fear is clear that horses can feel a person's anxiety and fear. It may seem that the horse is only reading the physical reactions of a person, perhaps the tight legs, stiff hands, bracing by the person for a possible reaction and other subconscious physical reactions. However, the study on people knowing when they are being stared at, shows that even the human can feel things that are NOT physical. So surely if the human can feel this a horse can feel it better. So both studies really help confirm the other and only give more proof that you cannot hide your feelings or fear from a horse. **Hence the saying, horses keep up honest since they make it impossible for us to lie to them.**

You can do your own experiment on this if you just look back at your previous interactions with your horse. I see this with Mr. "T". If I am worried, preoccupied with other matters or upset at something else going on in my life, Mr. T always knows it. No matter how I try to hide it or conceal it, Mr. T acts different when I feel differently. When I am tense, he is tense. When I am relaxed, he is relaxed. He knows how I feel and mirrors those feelings. Which is why the saying: A horse is a reflection of you. Another saying is: Meet the horse, meet the person. If the person is fearful, spooky, untrusting, neurotic, attention deficit disorder (A.D.D), then the horse will display these traits. No matter how smart or good people think, they are at hiding who they really are, horses will know and they will see your fear and insecurity. Some will try

to mask this by being loud, mean and aggressive or using pain or control devices on the horse, this only reinforces what the horse already knows. Good Horsemen will see this as well. Good Horsemen know that horses tell on their rider or handler. A horse's reactions and behavior will tell many things about their owner, their so-called training and other things. Watch the horse and learn many things about the person. Meet the horse and meet the person.

This is just another reason why sending a horse to trainers never works out. A horse knows the difference between you and the trainer. They know if the trainer will spur, hit, or manhandle them and they know if you will not do those things since you love them and want to be their friend. Loving a horse will NOT cover or hide your fear or insecurity. In fact, I think it makes it more clear for the horse not to trust you and not to believe who or what you are. When you try to deceive the horse, he learns not to trust or believe you. The more you try to fool a horse the more he learns to mistrust you and that you are not who you try to be and will never really know who you are.

I called these people "Fakers". They are phony, scared, uneducated about horses and think they are being so smart. Fakers think they are fooling the horse and fooling others. They are easy to spot if you know what to look for. They will be loud, they will be talking and explaining what they do and why, they will be trying to justify how smart they are and how much they know. They will always want to share their limited and mostly wrong knowledge by always giving and offering unwanted advice. They will justify things like my horse needs spurs, my horse needs a bit, my horse needs tough love, all of this is just a cover for their fear and inability to progress and learn better ways. However, the Fakers think they are fooling others and fooling their horse. Those who know are not fooled and the horse is never fooled. The horse may go along, it may not exploit their ignorance and it may just accept them in certain circumstances. But the horse will never develop a bond or trust, it will not grow with the Faker since the Faker is in denial, the Faker has convinced themselves that they are not the problem and it is the horse's fault and the horse is the one with all the problems.

Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.

Licking and Chewing by the horse - Is it Pain, Fear, or Learning?

Licking and chewing is not necessarily learning, it is a release of tension, allowing saliva to produce, getting oxygen and normally showing a release in pressure or tension. Could it be said that when a horse relaxes he learns? Can it be that when a horse learns he feels comfortable therefore, he reduces his fear? People may be right when they say a horse learns when he licks his lips, but I think that is a superficial explanation. To fully understand horses and how they live and see things, I think we should look deeper and see that reducing fear is done with better understanding and communication **NOT pain and more intense pressure**. Fear is such a powerful motivator and inhibitor in horses and in people. As a Horseman, it is our responsibility to help the horse, understand his fear and discover ways to communicate with the horse that helps reduce his fears, pain and confusion. Which is why I say ***when you get better, your horse gets better.***

"Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment." -- Benjamin Franklin

I fail at this often with Barn Witches.

Evolution and time has shifted fear from its primary instinctual use to now it is more of an emotional use. Is this good or bad? At best, it is confusing and makes the water muddy. Clean and exact answers are not available. Much like in horses and horsemanship too many

variables to come up with one right answer or one right way. One thing is for sure, is fear causes many people to create what they fear instead of what they want. In horses, if you project, intentionally or unintentionally, a negative or fearful behavior or emotions, the horse will pick this up. Conversely, if you are positive and trusting you will send the horse messages that will instill confidence and leadership. Being clear and honest with yourself and your horse is the best policy. Trying to trick, conceal, hide, and deceive your horse only makes your horse confused and more likely to distrust you.

Just one example of this is watching someone kicking their horse to go, but they are scared and worrying about the horse possibly going too fast so they pull on the reins out of fear. Sometime this unconscious pulling makes the horse go backwards, when you really want the horse to go forward. This subconscious fear that people do instinctively and without thinking about it is what causes lots of failure in horses. Then people wonder why the horse is backing up when they think they are telling the horse to go forward. This unconscious fear and actions are very confusing and unfair to the horse. This could be corrected easily if the person was more aware of what they are doing and realizing the horse is only doing what it did, because of what they did.

When people develop a positive attitude towards fear they grow. Fears have less of a chance of establishing roots in an individual with a positive attitude. Some say there is absolutely no reason to fear anything. Fear is never warranted. It is always counterproductive. Denying fear and fooling yourself only promotes a negative attitude and causes failure. Don't let a concern turn into a fear. Concerns are fine, fears should be unacceptable. Don't predict the things you fear or they may come true.

We strengthen what we focus on. The more attention we give to fear the stronger it gets. The key to overcoming the incapacitating affects of fear is to bring our emotional, logical and instinctive behavior into harmony and balance with our horse and ourselves. And this is NOT done by **"making a horse respect our space"**.

Controlling Fear is about not focusing on the fear. If you fear the dark, do not focus on the dark, think about light, if you fear a dog biting you, think and visualize a dog licking and loving you. In horses, people fear their fear, they fear the horse's size, they fear getting hurt by the horse's reactions to his fear, and they fear the lack of ability to predict what the horse will do. A person's survival instinct is to protect themselves and not to get hurt, so it is as natural as the horse's fear to survive and not want to get hurt. However, here is the big difference to me. A horse does not fear getting hurt, he fears being eaten and killed. A horse's fear is much more valid, strong and powerful than a human's fear. Yet people want to "demand" that a horse to ignore and control his fear at all times. That is an unfair expectation, it cannot happen, **there are NO dead broke horses**, no horses that do not have fear and believing this or expecting this from a horse only sets the horse up to fail and that means you fail.

This is one person's opinion of fear:

"We feel fear because we are afraid something painful or unpleasant will happen to us. And the reason we expect a hurtful experience is because we consciously or subconsciously believe we are at fault – inadequate, incompetent, awkward, clumsy, laughable, shameful, blameworthy, deserving of punishment, and the list goes on."

I am not sure I necessarily agree with the above statement, but I will agree that ego and pride causes people to react to their fear differently. One way people do this is to blame the horse. By blaming the horse, or breed, or the trainer or other things, it shifts responsibility from them to someone else. This sets up an attitude of I am right and I know everything therefore it must be the horse of someone else. If you think you know it all, you are not open to learn or listen. That means not learning or listening to your horse or to anyone else. This attitude is very widespread in the horse world. This "I know it all" attitude and it just hurts horses since the people with this ego end up doing stupid things that causes a horse to pay.

I believe fear is transferred from you to horse and from horse to you, knowing this and accepting this will help you control your fear, which will help the horse deal with his fear better. Fear goes up and down the reins and through the saddle, a horse knows from your heart rate, to your stiffness, to your voice and other subconscious clues you send out. Trying to hide this from the horse makes your horse distrust you. Horses know if you know, they know if you are trying to fool them or trick them, they keep you honest. This is why I believe

horses do not fear kids, since kids are fearless and honest. Horses do not fear or react to mentally challenged (special needs or retarded) kids, since these kids do not try and hide who they are, they do not deceive or trick, these kids are honest since they don't know how to be dishonest, this comes off as non-fearful and non-threatening to the horse. This makes the horse feel comfortable and safe.

Of course the other side to this is older humans, who are just getting back into horses, are overly scared of getting hurt, they think they know how to hide their fears or know how to trick or deceive the horse. This only shows the horse that these people are not honest and they should not be trusted. Then the horse fears and mistrusts the fearful human and you end up getting what you give and the horse becomes a reflection of you.

When you try to get a horse to ignore his fear, but you show fear, you actually show the horse he has something to fear. The horse does not know you are scared of him, he knows you are scared, he knows he cannot trust you, he will learn that you do not trust him and you end up creating what you try to prevent.

Controlling your fear and emotions is critical to help a horse that is scared, the more you control your fear, the more it will become natural and you will not need to work at it or think about it, it will just happen. Knowing that you are responsible for making your horse confident or spooky will help you be more aware of what you do and what you are showing your horse.

So not wanting to get hurt is normal and shared by most living things; however the way people handle or deal with that fear is very different. Some avoid the things or situations where they can get hurt. Some attack or seek out the things they are scared of to prove they can overcome or to prove they are not weak or to prove they are as good as any man. Some handle fear with anger, talking and voicing their strong position or control, all in attempts to hide their fear. Some handle fear with control or perceived control with pain or force; if these people stay involved in every detail and think they can prevent every failure, they think they are hiding their fear. Then they think they can control their fear by control events. Even if everyone knows that no one can control everything and danger is everywhere. It is unreasonable and unattainable to prevent everything that may go wrong, yet I see many inexperienced horse owners running around trying to control, prevent, and avoid fear and any hint of trouble. In addition, they normally create a spooky, fearful and insecure horse. There are many ways that fear can be attacked but regardless of how fear is confronted, if it is not controlled or faced it will prevent learning, growth and advancement in your horsemanship.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step and a horse of a thousand rides starts with its first ride.

Fear causes us to avoid things, to do things the easy way and to choose the path of least resistance. This is a cheat. You cheat yourself and your horse. The old hard ways, bits, and spurs are easy. The philosophy of, if it is not broke – do not fix it, is the easy way. As ambassadors of the horse, we should always be looking for kinder and better ways to interact with our horse. We should not follow the path of others, we should make our own path and leave a trail for others to follow.

I hope this page expands your knowledge and understanding of fear and how it interferes with a loving and positive relationship with your horse.

Happy trails always,

Rick

[Discussing Verbal Communication and Vocal Cues to Horses:](#)

I was told, by someone paying good attention, that I use different voices when I communicate

with my horses. This is an astute observation and probably many have noticed this, but they may not have connected it, or recognized the importance, or observed the changes in my horses when my voice changes.

When I correct or warn Buddy for sticking his head in my truck, Buddy knows the tone and sternness in my voice. But if I was not consistent and did not always connect my stern voice with follow-up action, then it would mean nothing. If I do not change my voice or verbal cues then my horses would be guessing and wondering what I want them every time I talked, every time I said hi to someone they would have to guess if I wanted them to do something. Many of my verbal changes, reactions and communication have become instinctive to me, since I do them with little or no conscious thought. This has happened over time from doing it for so long and now it has become somewhat of muscle memory, habit or instinctive type action.

There is no class or instruction manual for this, it comes from experience. This comes from learning from many horses and experiencing failure many times. ***When learning anything, you must be willing to fail and must know that you will not be that good at first and must be willing to work hard, put time and effort and practice into your goal or objective, so you can get better.*** Professional golfers did not get to top by trying to play golf in their spare time and only playing a few hours on the weekend. This is the same for professional Ball players or professional Musicians or Doctors or any other field that requires a large amount of proficiency and knowledge in order to be considered good or at the top of the field. It is no different with horsemanship. In fact, it all the other professions mentioned, you are not likely to get killed or serious injured if you make a mistake while learning or don't know what you are doing. ***So why do people take horse ownership so lightly?*** They are fooled into believing that horses are kind and won't hurt you and that horses love people and horses like to be ridden and horses are not mean. Even if all those facts are correct, everyone wants to ignore the other obvious dangerous factors. Like how horses are not tame like a pet dog, they are instinctual animals with a high drive to survive. That they are a fear driven animal and their fear and fast, quick, and unpredictable movements is what keeps them alive. There ability to move 1000 pounds from zero to 35 miles per hour in about 3 seconds. their ability to kick with power of a moving car or their fear can be pushed in to fight when cornered.

Those that end up getting good in their horsemanship and those that put in the effort and time to understand and succeed, have normally invested considerably. They have put in time to read and learn, they have failed many times, they have learned from many horses, they have learned from others that have failed and others that have succeed, they did not just get lucky or have a gift or have some special horse whisperer gene. ***Successful Horsemanship comes at a cost and most of that cost is experience, time and willingness to sacrifice so they can get better. They must never start thinking they know it all.*** And the ones that succeed best are the ones that do it from heart and for the love of horses, not necessarily those that do it for a job or money.

I absolutely agree there are many verbal and vocal cues that go into horsemanship and communication with horses. However, I think horses learn a lot of it and it is not instinctual. A Horse has very limited and small number of verbal or vocal communication skills. So just because my horses may have developed this skill it is not by accident. This is learned behavior and was caused or taught by my actions and me. Most anything can be taught to horses with consistency. Since horses are so attuned to their environment, they learn very quickly. This unique and fast ability to learn is why most people teach their horses many things and then wonder why or how a horse learned what they do. When working and training dogs in the military you have to use a suspicious voice and tone to get a dog to want to find or want to look for someone and that is called a verbal cue, just like a command to SIT is different than a happy hello. ***A request is said different than an order.*** The problem I see is that most people are inconsistent and find it hard to grasp the concept of controlling their body movements and positions and posture consistently, so trying to add more and teach them to control their voice, inflection, tone, volume, words (key or cue words), flat, monotone, pitch, all combined with speed of your language, emphasis, loud, angry, stern, requesting, authoritarian, praise and probably many I missed, is all very complicated and might just confuse people more. Voice, verbal and vocal language is an entirely different level or aspect of communication. I also think it is very small compared to non-verbal, especially with horses. So concentrating too much on this is somewhat putting the cart in front of the horse.



"Stupid Horse"

I do think people are better at verbal communication than horse, about the only thing they may be better at than horses. But all the experts say 75 to 80% of all communication is Non-verbal, like expression, body and hand position, eye contact and many other non-verbal cues people use when we think we are communicating verbally. Many of these are done subconsciously and without thought. ***If people communicate 80% non-verbal, then horses communicate 99% non-verbal.***

When I am stressed, fed up irritated with ignorant situations, Mr. T totally picks up and he changes, he looks and wonders if I am talking to him, if I am irritated with him or asking for something or telling him something. He changes and I notice it and recognize it and I have to clear it up for him. I have to downgrade my voice, tone or volume and let him know it is not meant for him or I have to be more direct and make sure he knows it is meant for him. Constant adjustments, constant changes, always reflecting on the situation and the horse's responses or changes I get from a horse. This enables me to change what I do so I can get the desired response and help the horse find the right answer.

The old saying: "The only constant in life is change"

This saying also applies to horses. Every thing changes a 1000 times a day, the wind, the environment, the surroundings, cars, planes, rain, other people, other horses, new trailers, new fences, new dogs, new chickens, trees that are cut down or branches that have fallen off, the length of the days, the temperature, your mood, your fears, your focus, your stress level, your patience, your understanding, your confusion, lots and lots of changes are always taking place and a horse knows and recognizes most of them. **Horses have to recognize these changes since their life and survival depends on it.**

Prey animals can tell when predators are hunting or just resting. Horses do not run from all predators just because they are predators. They do not run from all dogs or all lions or all people, they evaluate many other factors to determine if they are being hunted, are in danger or if the predator is hunting or stalking. **Horses pay close attention to all changes since their life and survival depends on it.** These traits are slowly being lost through domestication, but the deep instinctual genes are still present and will continue to drive this survival instinct and survival reactions.

I talk a lot about you cant separate things into compartments when working with horses. You can't just work on your voice and just work on your body and just work on rearing or just work on tying, everything in horses are connected. When you think you are working on just one thing, if you do not pay attention or have enough experience, you will end up teaching other bad things while trying to fix just ONE thing. **Getting too focused is just as bad as being not focused at all.** Which is exactly what happens when fear gets involved and ends up taking over. When inexperience people get scared with their horse, they forget everything except their fear, they get tight, they get stiff, they squeeze, they bend their legs, their heart rate goes up, and their ability to reason is decreased and most completely forget about their horsemanship, their horse or what they are doing or telling the horse. Most people absolutely vapor lock on their fear or their survival and can only think about not getting hurt or making the horse listen, so they do not get hurt. What they do not know is by doing this instinct reaction to their fear, their odds of getting hurt goes up 10-fold. The longer people are in

horses, the more times they get hurt, the more hard lessons they learn will teach them how to ignore their fear and concentrate more on the horse, what the horse is feeling and how to help the horse. A big problem now in the horse world is there are many older women who cannot afford to learn these hard horse lessons, so they either avoid situations so they will not have to learn or make excuses for the horse's behavior. That incorrect behavior only holds the horse back and holds them back. ***Fear is such a crippling emotion in horsemanship.***

So being aware that using your voice correctly and consistently with your body can assist in better communication with your horse, this may be good to know and good to be aware of, however, I don't think it is a big critical area that should be incorporated into your horse horsemanship until you are first proficient with good body language communication. But it is a good piece of knowledge to be aware of and to watch and notice if others use it correctly or if they are unaware that they are using it all.

If you would like to read another page about fear,

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The horse you get off of is not the same horse you got on; it is your job to make sure the change is for the better. -- Feeling down, saddle up. -- Good horses make short miles

It is never the Horse's fault! -- Rick Gore Horsemanship