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

Horsemanship is about the horse teaching you about yourself.



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### [What is Horsemanship](#)

\*Photos Rick and Horses

\*Clinics on Request\*

\*Contact Rick



Think Like A Horse  
By: Rick Gore

[Move to top of page](#)

There is a saying that in order for the arrow to hit the bull's eye - means this is the result of a hundred misses. Good judgment is the result of learning from bad judgment. Time = experience = learning. Horses make us earn little bits of knowledge with great effort, so each small success is treasured. No one gave it and no one can take it away. You earn it and with each small breakthrough or advancement it brings joy, harmony and balance. One small step to the dream of being one with our horse. **Horsemanship is a process - not an event.** You cannot appreciate the view from the highest mountain top if you have not spent time in the lowest valley. Each breakthrough in understanding with your horse is appreciated more since it did not come easy. Those who do not remember this or try and take short cuts will be reminded in very hard lessons from the horse.

The primary rule of mastery is: Those who think they are masters are not. To master horsemanship you must not stop your study, no matter how far you think you have come. The highest Priest's of Zen say "Mi zai". Which translates to "Not Yet" or "Not Finished". You cannot think you have learned all you can. You have not yet made it to the top of the mountain and you must continue your journey.



Since horses are the best teacher of the horse, you must spend countless hours with your horse and many different horses to learn, talk and be one with the horse and to learn **the way of the horse**, but just when you think you have got it, another obstacle must be overcome. So the journey never ends and no one knows it all. Horsemanship is a constant struggle to learn more, master what you already know and always know that you do not know it all.

### **Thinking Like A Horse and Understanding Horses:**

A horse is a "**Precocial species**", meaning at birth it is almost fully developed and ready to move and keep up with the herd. The term Precocial normally means a longer gestation period so when the baby is born or bird is hatched, they are almost fully mature and able to move and survive. A horse can run within hours of being born. For the correct pronunciation of **Precocial Click Here.**

The word "Precocial" is derived from the same root as precocious, implying in both cases early maturity in biology, the term Precocial refers to species in which the young are relatively mature and mobile from the moment of birth or hatching. (horses)

The opposite of Precocial is **Altricial meaning "requiring nourishment"**, refers to a pattern of growth and development in organisms which are incapable of moving around on their own soon after hatching or being born. The word is derived from the Latin root alere meaning "to nurse, to rear, or to nourish", and refers to the need for young to be fed and taken care of for a long durations. (humans)

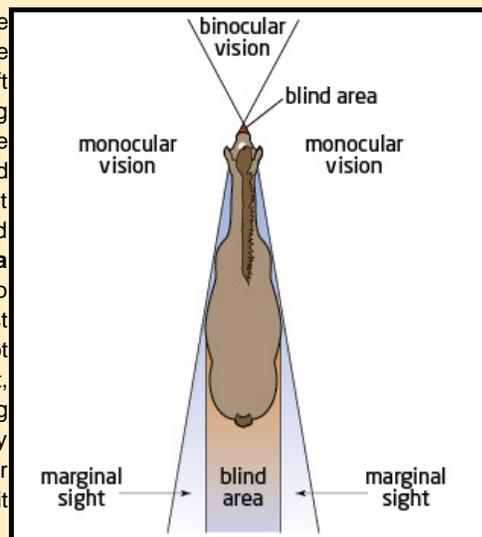
"A horse is a reaction looking for a place to happen." Mother Nature has designed horses for speed and flight to stay alive. Although they can be a very good fighter if cornered or trapped, they will always choose to run if they can, which is why only a fool traps a scared horse. A horse is born "right brained" for Reaction. Your goal is to get them to use their "left-brain" which is for Logic or thinking. When a horse is scared, surprised or pushed too fast they react. When you get them to think and not react, you teach them to respond and you have them using their left-brain. **In the horse world, the one that moves their feet away first (gives up ground) loses.** You have to move your horse and not let him move you. You tell the horse you are higher, smarter and the leader by making a horse yield to you and your pressure. Here is how Parelli explains [how a horse's brain works.](#)

Remember: Right brain = Reaction and Left brain = Logic - It is easy to get a horse to react, it takes understanding to get a horse to respond and think.

**Here is a great link** that explains horse ears, eyes and locking leg joints. Really worth checking out [Horse Biology Interactive Site](#)

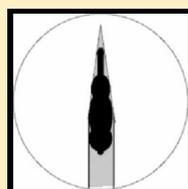
### Understanding Horse Vision:

Horses have very unique eyes. They can see out of one eye and each eye can see something different or independently. The left can see on the left while the right is seeing something different on the right, this is one reason why they spook so easy and jump and react to changes around them. Humans cannot do this so it is hard for them to see the world through a horse's eyes. **Using one eye at a time is called Monocular Vision.** [Mono meaning one] Which is why a horse can almost see all the way around their bodies, to spot predators and other dangers so they can react, run, flight and survive or live. Understanding this behavior is normal and not spooky or crazy will help you to STOP blaming or labeling your horse. A horse is only a horse and that is all it knows how to be.



Horses need to be able to move their heads up and down in order to focus on things on the ground and in front of them (also to use for balance and counter balance but that is another topic). A horse's depth perception is dependant on them using their head movement to focus on things far and close. So when some riders keep the bit so tight that it keeps a horse's head tucked low and bent into their chest, because it looks cool or gets them points in a show, it takes away the ability of the horse to focus on things. This can cause a horse to trip (they can't balance), stumble, become more spooky, fearful and insecure and loose footing. Ever notice a horse bobbing his head up and down as he looks at water, a stream, a ditch or a puddle? He is trying to focus and determine how deep the water is and is it safe. He is not being mean, stubborn or a bad horse.

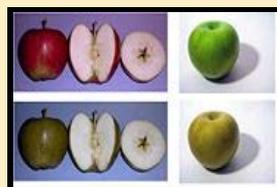
If you to see why a bit is bad watch [How Bits Create Pain to a Horse](#)



On the photo to the left, the shaded area is the blind spots to a horse. They can also use both eyes at the same time to see the same thing. That is called their **Binocular Vision.** [Bi=Two or both] On the photo on the right, you can see how a horse needs to keep his head level to use his binocular vision, when running.

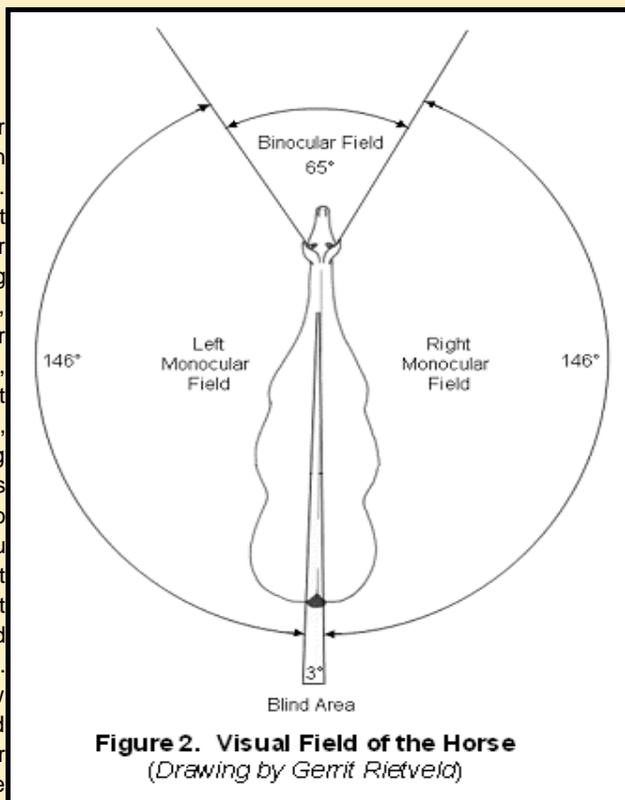


Understanding and remembering a horse's vision limitations will help you to be more understanding the next time your horse spooks, is unsure or is bobbing his head. Another



The photo on the left of the apples shows what we see and what a horse sees. The one with more color is what we [human predators] see, the shades [lacks color] is what a horse sees. Since they see shades they are slower at recognizing things that may be common to us. They also may confuse things and not recognize common things as fast or as good as humans, so cut them a break.

Horse's have more rods in their eyes which gives them much better night vision than us. However, there ability to adjust from light to dark is much slower than our human eyes. So moving a horse from light to dark areas, like barns, stalls, arenas or trailers, can be scary to them, since they lose their vision and it will appear almost pitch black, where they cannot see anything clearly. This delay also happens when going from dark areas to light areas, which is why you need to aware of bright headlights, flash lights, bright lights around gates, arenas and pastures, sunsets or sunrise, etc. This is another reason to slow down and try and understand when a horse stalls, balks or freezes up. A horse will always be a little more spooky as the sun



sets since it takes up to 30 minutes or so for their eyes to adjust. As the sun sets it creates more shadows which can confuse a horse when he is looking for predators or things that may eat him. This spookiness and clumsiness can also be caused by the sun being low and glaring straight into the horse's eyes or from a stupid human rider that is causing pain with a bit or spurs further making the horse more nervous and insecure. As a human we would put a hat on, hold our hand over our eyes to help us see or wear sunglasses, horses cannot do this, so they deal with the glare and blindness with confusion, spooks, tripping, head bobbing, fear and other things. When a human cannot see we are not worried about being killed or eaten, a horse sees the world differently since their life depends on it. This is why I think horses react to White things since white reflects light and causes glare to horses so they tend to be concerned about white things.



Here are two identical pictures, the one on the left is what a human sees, the one on the right is what a horse sees. Big difference and any reasonable person should be able to understand why a horse may be a little

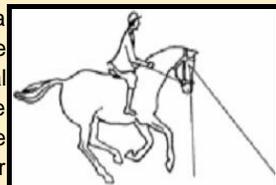


more nervous and moves his head so much and always seems to be trying to figure out things and may get spooked or confused, especially when the horse has a human yanking on his

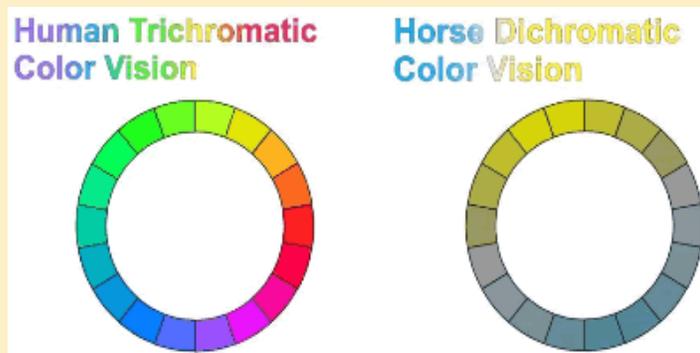
mouth, tying his head down and not allowing a horse to have his head. If you **click on either picture above** it will take you to a good article and explanation on horse vision.

So when you hear people force a horse into a trailer and the horse acts scared and the owners yell and get upset with their horse, you will know that, the owner is the one being stupid and they are making the horse scared and not understanding why the horse is acting like it is. To make this more understandably, remember when you walk into a movie theater and you have to stop and stand still for a few seconds until your eyes adjust. You may feel a little off balance or disoriented. Well our human eyes adjust within a minute or so. Imagine if when you walked into the theater and someone started pushing you and yelling at you or hitting you with a whip forcing you to move faster when you are somewhat blind. It would not take long for you to start NOT to like walking into a theater or being around the dummy hitting or pushing you. Put yourself in your horse's hooves. The more you learn about the horse the more you will start to **Think Like A Horse** and stop thinking like a know it all human.

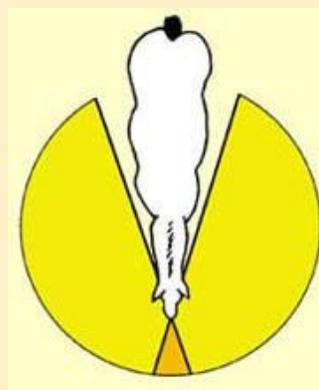
In the picture to the right you can see when someone holds a horse's head down, on the bit, controlling the head, uses a tie down, uses draw reins, [sometime called fancy names like "Vertical Flexion"] all of these force a head down and interfere with the horse's ability to adjust his head so he can see better, balance better and feel more comfortable. And people wonder why their horses don't like shows or arenas or pain from a bit, seems pretty easy for me to understand why, can you?



In the photo below right you can see the difference between what colors humans see and how horses see the same colors, this will explain why horses react differently to things and as horsemen we need to have understanding and help the horse understand and give the horse time to adjust to things differently than we do. A "life long" horse owner will tell "show the horse who is boss" and "make the horse respect your space" or "teach that horse some manners" a real horseman (horsewoman) will help the horse, show understanding and compassion for the horse, knowing the horse is doing the best they can with the eyes and instincts they have. If you [click on the color vision picture below](#) I have linked it to a good article that explains the picture in more detail.



Below is a picture that shows monocular and binocular vision of a horse. I have linked the picture to a good [article on horse vision](#) that explains it in different terms than I have already.



**Moving back to right brain verses left brain**, horses that are very fearful are normally called right brained (All horses are scared to die). You have to get to know them so they will begin to trust you, you have to spend time with him and don't ask anything from him until they relax and so they can start thinking and not reacting. Then start asking small easy things very briefly. Go see your horse and bring a pocket full of grain, carrots or hay and just let him know that you don't want anything from him. Let him relax with you and not fear or react to you. Horses are very forgiving, but you have to go slow. The slow way is the fast way with horses. **Release is the Key! Release is taking away pressure.** A horse will always be looking and searching for release (horses are comfort seeking and pressure avoiding animals). Release is a very misunderstood term. It is the opposite of pressure. Unless you know when you giving pressure, you cannot know how to release it. Think about this and not what you think pressure is, **ONLY** what the horse see as pressure. *When you ask that is pressure and when you stop asking that is release.*

#### **Pressure and Release is the same as Advance and Retreat**

So in order to know you are teaching a horse the right thing, you have to make sure and release pressure when the horse is doing the correct thing (Stop asking). If you stop pressure at the wrong time, the horse will be confused and think what ever he was doing, when you stopped pressure (gave release/moved away/stopped pressure/changed what you want), was the right thing, when in fact it was the wrong thing. So if a horse pins his ears and tries to push you away, if you move away (release pressure or yield to his pressure) he thinks pinning his ears is the right answer to get you to move away, since he got a release of your pressure by making you move away. Since you don't want your horse doing this, you have to continue pressure or not release pressure when he pins his ears. Then when he stops pinning his ears and shows submissive behavior (not aggressive behavior), then you stop (release) pressure. That tells the horse that being submissive is the right answer to get you to stop (release) pressure. Most people want to praise, pet, hug, pat, kiss, talk (good boy) or other things when a horse does the right thing, this is wrong. All of these things are pressure to a horse and if you give pressure the horse thinks he is not doing the right thing. So talking and parising like you do a dog, confuses the horse and in the horse's mind, he never gets release since you don't shut up and stop ALL pressure. A very common and confusing mistake.

**Remember, it is never the horse's fault.** Horses react to what we do or to what is happening around them. They do not care about what we say, think, wish, hope or would like to happen, they only care about what we do, what they have to do or what is happening around them. The calmer you are, the calmer the horse will be. If you pull a horse, the horse will pull. If a horse plants their feet, don't pull straight or you will lose since they are bigger and stronger than you. By pulling and losing, you teach them they are stronger (not good and you don't want them to know this). Be smarter not stronger or meaner. If a horse stalls, use pressure on his hind end (butt or hindquarters) to move it away from you while pulling his head to the side or toward his butt, then his head will come to you without you trying to pull his head forward. Moving a horse's feet shows him that you are higher and that he must respect you as his leader, since you can move his feet (or stop his feet). Not moving them fast and making him run and getting tired, move him slow, calm and consistent. So you can move him backwards, forward, in a circle, left, right, pick up his feet, put them down, flex his head left or right, have him follow you, have him stop, all of these show a horse you can move his feet when you want, shows him that you control him, so he will see you as his leader (a higher horse).

**Stopping a horse's movement is the same as making him move.** It shows control and dominance and leadership. So if you stop a horse's movement (or change his direction) you are also telling him you are higher, you are the leader, you are smarter. Anytime a horse appears to forget this, you can do simple things to reinforce this and make sure he sees you as his leader. **It is a horse's nature to test you, so don't take it personal.** He is just being a horse. He has to test you to make sure you are really (smarter) still the leader. It is their nature to try and move up in the herd or pecking order. It is their instinct to try and find and push lower horses. If you are consistent, he will test you less and less and not very hard. If you are not sure, get in a hurry, ignore his little test, think you know it all, ignore the horse, confuse the horse, misunderstand the horse, the test will get bigger and more severe. Then you will have to work harder to show him you are still his leader. So **BE AWARE** of the little test and be ready to show him, nice and calm, that you understand him and you are still able to move and control his feet and you are still his leader. Being aggressive, forceful and attacking may get the same results, but your horse will soon learn to be nervous around you and will always be ready for you to attack him or be aggressive, that will damage your long term relationship with your horse. You may have to get aggressive sometime, but it should be the exception

and not the rule. If you are fighting and being aggressive (showing him who is boss) every day and every time you are with him, then you need to realize that what you are doing is NOT working and you are doing it wrong. Every time you get aggressive, your horse becomes desensitized to your aggressions, soon you will have to do more and more to get the same results. Less is more, always try and see if you can do less to get the same results from the horse. Below is a picture of a horse running, notice the feet movement and the order that the feet hit. If you click on the picture it will take you to a page that talks more about the picture. Understanding horses completely from the way they think, move, react, see, eat and live will help you to be a better leader for your horse.



**Pecking Order and Dominance:** This is a basic part of horses(herd behavior). They need structure, they need higher and lower horses in a herd, they need to push and be pushed (shown dominance). So dominance relationships are needed and important between horses. This drive to yield and follow the more dominant horse is displayed some time in horse racing. A faster horse will lose a race if a slower and more dominant horse is in front. The dominant horse will send minor body clues that tell the lower (faster) horse not to pass, and even if whipped, spurred or beat by the rider, the horse will yield to the higher (more dominant) horse and will not pass. This is why it is critical that you be seen, recognized and respected as a higher horse. Seeing your relationship with your horse as a herd will help you understand the horse better. This process is also helps keep order in the herd, it is a way to teach discipline and respect to younger horses so they can grow up to be productive and effective members in the herd. Elephant herd behavior is a lot like horse herd structure and behavior. You can read about elephant herd in the link below.

#### [Article on Elephant Social Structure](#)

**Horse's Ears:** Horses do a lot of communicating with their ears. All horses pay close attention to other horse's ears. Ears are so important that in cases where a horse lost control of his ears or had their ears nerves cut to prevent pinning, those horses have a hard time communicating, surviving in a herd and dealing with other horses. I have a link to a document that does a nice job of [explaining horse ears](#). Like most things with horses it is not one thing that matters it is all things. So the ears are important, but head position, tail action, rear end movement, body position are all important and all send a message and is part of a horse's communication. So only watching the ears will not tell the full story. Being able to read the entire horse takes time, so be sure you are always watching the entire horse. Ears are just one way to talk, they use their body position, their head position, their butt position, their tail, their stance and some vocal, so pay attention to the entire and whole horse, not just the ears. I talk more about ears later.

I have a video where I discuss heavy rain and shelter. Being aware of your environment and realizing when it changes it may change the horse. Since horses are just a reflection of you (and their environment), you need to always be ready for changes. Anytime you take away from a horse, you need to realize that other instincts take over and become more reactive and their survival skills may become stronger. When you take away things or restrict things from a horse, other things become more important. If you prevent a horse from moving (tying) you increase other senses like sight, hearing and ability or want to flee, which puts a horse closer to fight mode (kicking). Understanding this helps prevent you from blaming a horse for acting like a horse.

If you take a horses sight away (over flexing, pain, walking into sunlight, [blindness](#), sand storm or splashing water) his inability to see will increase his other instincts (flee, fear, rear, kick, run, hearing, etc). These things are normal since you put a horse in a position that is unclear,

frustrating or fearful. Which is why sacking out is so important to help a horse understand and deal with fear. Dealing with fear in a thinking process rather than a fearful flight reaction.

So being Horse aware will give you a greater understanding of why a horse may react differently than what you may see as normal. By being aware of this will also enable you to prepare, be more confident and help the horse to deal with this change, rather than getting mad or being frustrated that your horse is acting "like a stupid horse".

**Baby Clacking Teeth** Many have seen baby horses clacking their teeth. This behavior is a sign of submission and is meant to tell higher horses that "I am no threat" "I am a baby, don't hurt me". You will see this done by normally baby horses but some time you will see it in older horses that have kept alone or horses under five that have not matured. Babies will do this to people some time as a sign of respect and submission. Some people who are not aware of this behavior will see this as threatening or aggression and will correct or hit the horse, this only confused the baby. A baby horse coming up with their head low and stretched out, clacking their teeth is not trying to bite or be aggressive. It is showing respect and asking to be allowed in close to make friends. This picture shows a baby clacking to mom or a higher horse.



**Talking Horse:** Horses don't come with an instruction manual. They are loving animals that just want to know what to expect. They want and need a strong leader. Horses only understand horse talk. So if you try and talk to them like a dog or your kids, they will only get confused and frustrated and you will start calling them stubborn and blaming them. You must learn to talk horse in order to have a good relationship with your horse. Talking horse is nothing more than understanding how a horse thinks, what they need and understanding what they are saying with body language not verbal human talk. It really is simple but seems so hard to teach and learn. Petting, cookies, and hugs don't mean much to a horse. They just want to be a horse. They do not want to be a person or a dog, they only know how to be a horse and that is all they want to be. In order to allow them to be a horse and be comfortable with you, you must understand them. They are flight animals. They are prey and we are predator. **Mother Nature told them at the first sign of trouble run, do not think, do not look, do ask what or why, just use your legs and run to live.** Their best defense to survive is speed. Run from danger at high speed and you live. Stand around and think and you die. It is that simple for the horse. So when a horse get scared or tries to run, don't get mad at them, don't be rough with them and don't label them as mean, dumb or stupid. They are simply being a horse, trying to survive in our world. A horse is pure horse and that is all they know. Run when in trouble to stay alive. In the horse world and in a herd, horses are always talking. Most people don't see it or know it, but horses are great communicators. The way they move, how they hold their ears, where their head is, how their body is positioned, what their tail is doing, the speed they are moving, are they looking with one eye or two, all send messages to other horses. If you don't learn this language, then your horse will be talking to you and you will not hear him or understand him, so he will either stop talking or get more aggressive to try and get you to listen.

In the picture below, you will see two **Prey Animals** bonding. They find comfort and safety in numbers, they are herding, bonding, what those that do not know call buddy sour or herd sour, this is just prey animals seeking comfort and safety by being together, they are using numbers to survive. They have doubled their ability to hear or see **Predators**. To the unknowing it may look cute or nice, it is basic survival skills and if you don't see that then you will misunderstand the horse since it is also a prey animal.



A horse communicates to let you know he understands what you are saying or to make you do something. This process is often misconstrued. You think he is saying one thing, he is saying something else and you both react to the wrong message. Then you both react to the reaction. And in the end, the dumber animal wins. A horse is not a fighter, he is a runner. So if you push a horse to fight, that means you have taken away his ability to run, then you will be sorry. Making a horse fight is a bad move on your part. I always hear, my horse kicked me for no reason. At that moment I know that this person does not understand horses and the horse gave many clues before he kicked and that person was not aware of the clues, did not understand the clues and was clueless before they were kicked. So when you get hurt or kicked, it is always easy to blame the horse. If you understand a horse, talking to them is easy. They want to do what is easiest, they want to know how to stop you from asking them something. They are always searching for the right answer to get you to stop pressure. **Small steps are best, small victories are best, each task needs to be broken down into several small steps.** Humans want it all right now and if they don't get it, they go into predator mode and get mad, angry and resort to force or fear to get what they want. Not a good or effective approach with a fear animal. Don't get me wrong, you can get a horse to stand on one leg if you use enough brutal means. That is not horsemanship, that is not working with a partner, that is being the ultimate predator, beating a dumber kinder animal into submission, it is breaking a horse's spirit with fear and pain, it is just mean and stupid.

**Watch horses in a herd, spend hours just observing their interactions, watch as they move around and talk to each other, figure out why one horse does what he does and why the others do what they do.** It is truly amazing how much is going on in a herd. This will improve your understanding of the horse and will make you a better horse talker. You will be able to tell which horse is higher, which horse is lower, who has clear leadership and who is being questioned and tested, you will see test from each horse, you will see higher horses moving lower horses calmly and slowly without force, fear or pain. You will see corrections and kicks and bites if lower horses do not listen to higher horses. **That is why when you get kicked or bit,** it is the horse telling you, he thinks you are lower and he is higher. That should tell you, you are not being a strong or good leader, you let the horse down and the horse is confused. **It is NOT the horse being mean or angry.** Watch lead horses do more while asking less. The horse is the best teacher of the horse.

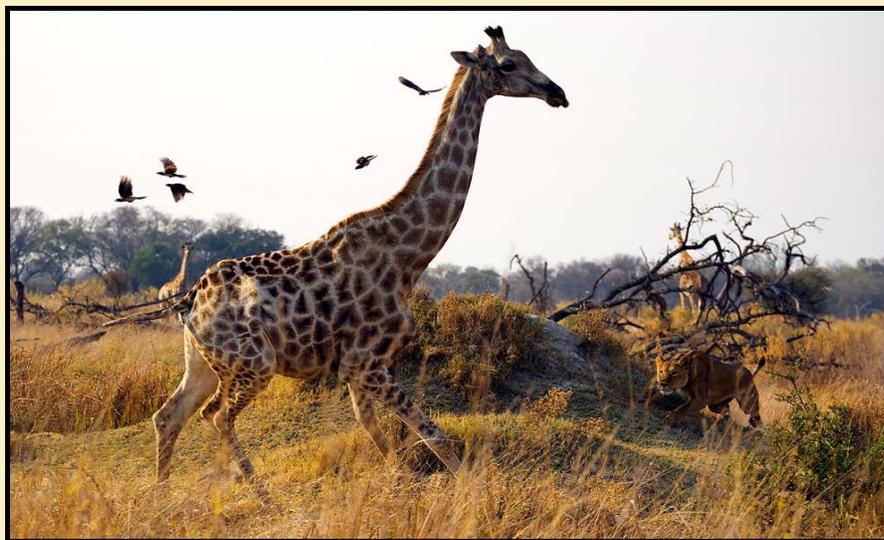
**Robot Respect:** One key to good horsemanship is to get your horse to look forward to seeing you and wanting to be with you. I see too many people take a horse out, work it, round pen it, saddle it, ride it and stick it back in a stall (cell). People will only come out to see their horse at feeding time and while feeding will be talking on the cell phone, chatting with other people and ignoring their horse. Then they wonder why their horse won't come to them and why the horse always fights with them. Horses are curious, don't lose that and never stop it. Too many people beat the curiosity out of a horse and want a robot horse, one that "respects their space", stands still, never moves unless told. This is not my idea of a partnership or friendship - more like a slave and master and that is not much fun for either of you. This teaches a horse to fight with you, resist you and always challenge you. Seeing someone with a horse that is always fighting, yelling and blaming the horse is a terrible sight. Too many horses have to put up with people who think horses are a big pet that they can control for their own egos. These people will never get what true horsemanship is all about. Horses can be dangerous and have to be controlled, but not constantly picked at and harassed or you will make them more dangerous and less in control. People want to justify aggressive behavior with I feed my horse good, I take good care of my horse, my horse needs this or he will be dangerous and so on.

All of this is a justification for their inability to get results without pain, fear and aggression. True horsemen will always be searching for kinder and gentler ways to get better results. Work on yourself and your horse will get better.

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### Predator Body Language

I get lots of questions on how do I use my body to talk to a horse. This picture shows great body language from a single still picture. Take a look at the lion about to attack, is there any confusion about what he is about to do, is there in confusion that the prey animal better more or will get eaten. Notice the predator has his body facing the target, she is squared off on the target, she is focused on the target, she is crouching ready to lung or pounce, her eyes are close together like most all predators. Learning to use your body and not your mouth will help you better communicate your wants or intentions to the horse.



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Asking A Horse is better than always telling a horse. Laugh, enjoy and encourage a horse's playfulness and curiosity. By exploring, they are learning, the more they do this the better they will be later. **You can't do this if you are scared, insecure or afraid of horses!** In most training, I like to ask the horse several times and escalate with each ask. I will ask, Please(1), Pretty Please(2), You better(3), opps-you should have(4). This model gives a horse a chance to figure out the correct response and does not ambush the horse. With that being said, an ambush is what a horse gets if he threatens me. I still give him assistance in knowing the right response, but I don't ask please or pretty please, I go straight to you better and you should have. There is so much information out there for training tips that it is endless. Horse owners have a responsibility to educate themselves and learn the way of the horse. Stop telling people how long you have ridden, how long you have owned horses, how many horses you have owned, etc. None of that matters to the horse. A horse wants to know if you are a strong safe leader he can depend on, so he knows if he should follow and respect you. If someone asked you if you want a piece of pie, you may say ummm, what kind is it, you may smell it and then you may taste it and enjoy it. However, if someone walked up to you with you favorite pie and shoved it in your face and said here eat this, you would not like it, even thou it is your favorite. Yet I see horse people do this all the time to their horse. If a horse shows a reaction to a cone, tarp or other new thing, the owner will take it personally and then shove it at the horse, put it in their face, tie it to them, or force it on the horse and then get mad at the horse for not liking it or accepting it. If they approached like offering politely a nice pie and were just more civil about it, slowly presented it to the horse, let him smell it and understand it will not hurt him, then the horse would be more likely to accept the new thing. Remember the golden rule, treat your horse the way you would want to be treated if you were a horse.

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### Big Girl Panties Zone

Some think I am too hard on women, others think I do women a favor by telling it like it is. I use the phrase if you watch my videos, ask me questions or read my site, you need to have your bid girl panties on. One of my Big Girls made me this image so I thought I would share it.



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### Prey verses Predator - Accepting the Differences

Herd animals need each other so killing in disputes is not normally done, unlike when predators fight it is more to the death or serious injury since doing away with the competition is to a predator's advantage, less competition means more food for me. That is why herd or prey animals rarely fight for injury but are more about display, intimidation and threats.

By dominating the high horse or alpha or lead horse, you actually dominate the entire herd. Horses in the wild drop babies at same time to play the numbers game, so if the herd is attacked, the numbers conceal, confuse and camouflage the babies, increasing their chances of survival.

Natural selection in the wild is the young, the old and the injured are taken first, leaving the strong, experienced and healthy around to teach and pass on their genes and knowledge.

Keeping horses in domesticated situations goes against most all natural prey instincts. Prey animals are claustrophobic, they find comfort in wide open spaces so they can see danger approaching. They like others of their same kind around them for safety in numbers. They need companionship of herd members to feel safe, to sleep and to find comfort with their own kind. A snake kept next to a mouse would make both go crazy. The snakes would feel uneasy and would be preoccupied with eating the mouse. The mouse would feel fear and uneasiness all the time thinking the snake would eat him. Yet people, who are meat eating predator's expect a horse to feel safe with them. That is an unfair expectation. **Predators and Prey animals do not become friends and do not hang out together in the wild, instincts and survival will not allow it.** Prey animals do not find comfort and safety hanging out and allowing Predators to do unnatural things to them. Things like controlling them, locking them up, trapping them, restricting their ability to flee, riding them, jumping on their backs and other things that people expect a horse to like or accept. Would you like to live with a lion or many lions? Would you sleep good in a lion's cage knowing the loin could eat you at any time? If you were locked up in a cage and periodically a lion would visit and come into your cage, would like it better when you were alone or with the lion? This is the life a horse. We are just lucky that horses are very forgiving and would rather run than fight. Horses accept their fate and will give in to almost anything, which is why they are abused so much. They allow anyone to take advantage of them and they do not fight back.

**Speak Horse:** If you were a teacher in China and could only speak English, you would not keep talking English and expect the kids to learn. And if they did not learn you would not use force or fear or yell at them in English, hit them or call them dumb or stupid for not learning. This would not teach them anything. Yet that is what people do to horses. They talk human

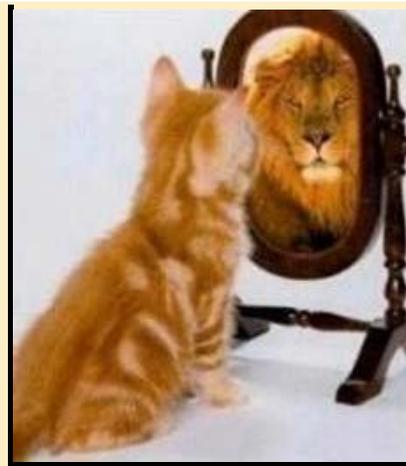
(English) and expect the horse to understand them. Then get mad or angry at the horse when he does not understand. You have to learn to speak horse if you want to talk to a horse, they don't know or understand human or English. They know release and learn from release. Their whole life is to run, flee or move away from pressure to stay alive. So release of pressure is what they seek.

A horse will always run if it can. They will always try to retreat when threatened or pressured. In the horse world, the one who moves their feet first (yields to pressure) loses. And the one that made them move is higher, smarter and the leader. After moving a horse's butt a few times, they will move their feet and you will be winning in the horse world. Horses are herd animals and have a very strict pecking order in the herd. A herd has a very numbered pecking hierarchy that can change each day. If all you do is baby your horse, they will eventually stop being scared or respectful of you and will try to dominate you and push you around. That is easier to fix than a horse that has been abused and is scared of you. By moving their butt you get them to trust you, you will gain their respect and everything will get easier. You have to require things of a horse in order for them to respect you. If you just feed them and never ask or require things of them, they will see you as weak and a lower horse, then they will test you and push you to make sure you stay lower and do not ask things of them. You have to have balance, you should not order a horse around all the time and you should not just give your horse treats and only feed them, balance will help the horse know their place in your herd of two.

Read about [Opposition Reflex](#) to gain a better understanding on why horses pull.

**Horses Always Test:** Horses first make sure they are safe and then try to test and dominate. If you put a horse in a new barn, he will be scared, spooky and very alert. To him he has not proven to himself that he is safe and does not know anything about the barn. If you leave him overnight, by morning he will have mouthed or moved just about every thing in the barn. See, once he figured out that none of the new things would hurt him, he had to move it and test it to see his position and to be assured that he was higher and that nothing was going to push back. If one of the things pushed back and moved him, then he would think that the thing pushing was higher than he was. They do the same thing to people. Although you don't have to back him down and correct every test, you have to be aware of what he is doing and push back when needed with the appropriate force. That comes with time and experience, some test, if the horse pushes with one pound of pressure, you need to push back with one and a half pounds of pressure. Other test he may push with five pounds and you need to push back with 10 pounds. Feel and timing is something that cannot be taught except by the horse. So it comes with doing it, being aware and knowing what works and what does not work. Timing on when you push back so the horse knows and connects the push is critical to learning for the horse. Feel is what tells you how hard to push back or if you even need to push back. Timing without feel will not work, so learning both is critical to being successful with horses.

People that always push and fear horses are normally scared and insecure so they think by pushing or being aggressive all the time, will make the horse respect them, that is not so. Someone who is confident and understands a horse and knows how to accept a horse for being a horse and prey animal, will not fill the need to always prove they are the boss. The will not nag and push and will not "make the horse respect their space" all the time. If they are confident then the horse will see that confidence and will see them as having strength and leadership. In the picture below, you will see what a confident kitty sees when he looks in the mirror. Who or what does your horse see when he looks at you?



**Fear or Respect:** Most horse issues are really people issues. We cause the issues, then we try and deal with them from our position as a human and not from the horse's position so the horse can understand. Most problems fall into two categories, fear or respect/lack of respect. Respect has to come from trust and movement. Respect also comes from fear that the horse knows YOU will make him listen and will make him do things. Many people forget this. Respect should not come from pushing and yanking the horse around. Make sure you deal with things from the horse's point of view and try to understand why the horse is reacting, if the horse's action is fear or disrespect motivated. Then you will understand how to address the issue. If you address a fear issues as a lack of respect issue, you will not fix the problem and will create more fear and confusion in the horse. If you address a lack of respect issue that is really a fear issue you will create more fear and confusion.

### **Don't Help Others:**

Horse people are good people that mean well and love horses. Most always want to try and help others, either we think the horse is in danger or we think the person may get hurt. This sometimes causes more problems. When a horse gets pressure from multiple people it tends to confuse the horse and cause him to pay less attention to his handler. People should not help other people unless in an emergency and even then they have to make sure they do not make the situation worse by helping. You may make the problem worse, get the handler hurt and not end up helping at all. It is better to talk to the person afterwards and give tips or advice, but we should not interfere with others when they are handling their horses. I can't count the number of times I was working with a horse and someone came over to help, clicked at my horse, start talking to my horse, put pressure on my horse, trying to help and totally defeated what I was trying to do. So just be aware that if people want your help, they will ask or you can offer it later, try not to interfere with someone handling their horse. This is dangerous and is very disrespectful to the other people. Good Horsemen know that if people want help they will ask. **If you stick your nose in, try and help and the horse or person gets hurt, you expose yourself to lawsuit, blame, bad feelings and future problems.** Worry about your horse not others. This is the sign of a good horseman. The fact is, the people always running around offering help, normally don't know what they are doing anyway, that is why they are interfering with other horses. If they really knew what they were doing, they would not help unless asked.

**Leaving Mom:** When moving young horses away from mom there will always be an adjustment period. All young horses don't like to leave their mom so it is normal for issues to arise. Some people move the baby away from mom at 3 to 6 months. I like leaving them together forever and let mom take care of weaning. No one weans the babies in the wild. There will be an adjustment period for mom and baby. Some people move them short distances so they can still see each other and talk, this may help this event from being so traumatic. Others like the fast break and complete separation. With horses I always like to stay as close as possible to nature. In the wild, the stud will push out the colts at about two and the mares stay with mom and the herd forever. Depending on your situation, you can do what is best for you. There are some good books out there and the more you read, the more you will start thinking like a horse. The better you think like a horse the happier your horse will be

and the happier you will be. Horses love it when people think like them, after all, we are supposed to be the smarter ones, yet we always want the horse to think like us. We talk human and expect the horse to learn our language. We need to learn the horse's language. **Leave babies with Mom, it helps the horse grow, mature, feel safe, learn better and you get a better horse down the years.** My advice leave babies with mom until mom kicks them off, period.

**Stalls:** I am not a fan and think they cause too many problems. Some of these are feet problems, colic problems, respiratory problems, pacing, wind sucking, cribbing, swaying and many others. If I was a horse, I would not want to go in a stall, it smells, it is small and confined, I am alone with no friends, little fresh air, little sunlight and I hear all sorts of noises that I can't see and don't know what the are. Any horse that dislikes a stall is very understandable to me, because I think like a horse. Now you add past bad experiences like abuse, neglect, or an injury that occurred in a stall and it is very easy to see the horse's point of view. The big advantage to a stall (cells) is that they are convenient for people. A big problem for a horse is too many people like to take the easy way. The easy way is usually bad for the horse and is at the horse's expense. If you must keep your horse in a stall, it is better to turn out as much as possible. If you are designing your own place have the stall access so the horse can come in and go as he pleases. Stalls do offer security and comfort in moderation, but the negatives far out weigh this minor benefit. Horses are very adaptable and will become attached to their stall if they associate it with food, no work and comfort. This can be bad. It can make a horse anti-social, it make a horse protective of his stall, it can cause him to fight with other horses next to him, it can cause a horse to become aggressive to people that walk by and don't feed or interact, it is all bad and stalling horses is bad for the horse. In the photo below the horse is cribbing and the photo shows the brain, according to one study the [brain of cribbing horses \(click here to read\)](#) are different than those of their non-cribbing herd mates. I have linked the image to the article, not real informative, but you can judge for yourself.



**Release Teaches:** Horses learn on the release of pressure. This takes time to learn, understand and master. Release or retreat has a lot to do with timing and feel. Whenever you stop doing something the horse thinks whatever he was doing, when you stopped pressure, is the right answer. That is why you never stop pressure during bad behavior. I see too many people tie a horse and when it starts pulling or freaking out, they rush over and untie it. This is bad timing and bad training. Only reward, which is to release or stop pressure, on a horse, when you get a right response, not during the wrong response. This is also called advance and retreat, advance meaning pressure and retreat meaning release of pressure. Soft hands make soft horses. Nervous owners make nervous horses. Owners that do not understand pressure and release confuse a horse and the horse never learns the right answer with timing and feel.

**Starting Horses:** In the old days, horses were not started until they were in their 4's or 5's, however they were handled a lot at two and then put out pasture to learn herd behavior and respect from horses not humans. Good horseman would teach everything on the ground, so

when they got in the saddle there were no surprises to the horse. Old rough cowboys would just manhandle and ride the bucks out, wear the horse down, use a big bit, pain and break the horse's spirit. A horse that is manhandled beat or trained with fear and pain, will never be a reliable or trustworthy steed. They will always see human's has things that cause pain and fear and are not to be trusted. When a horse is young and you have a lot of time, don't rush training and you will have a better horse in the end. There is an old horse saying; "If you take the time it takes, it takes less time" and the slow way is the fast way with horses. The best thing you can do is spend time with the horse. Let him know that he can trust you and you won't hurt it. Discipline is different than hurting and this is confused too often. A horse needs discipline both from other higher horses and from humans. The only time you should really correct aggressively is if a horse bites, kicks, rears or strikes at you. A horse needs direction not correction. It can take up to four years to break a horse correctly, yet I hear people say my horse had 60 days or 90 days of training and is dead broke. Horse pucky! It just ain't so.

**Respect My Space:** Many trainers will tell you to keep the horse away from you, don't let it get close, make them "respect your space." I don't do this all the time and don't suggest others do it. If you make your horse unhappy and always push it and correct it, when you are together, they will not want to be with me. Your horse should be happy to see you, should call to you and should come running to meet you. If they do not, you are doing something wrong. I let my horse rub his head on me. Many people see this and say that is bad, you should never let your horse do this. In some ways they are right, if you do not understand a horse and do not recognize that a horse could see this as pushing you and moving you, then it would be bad. **However if you understand a horse, you can tell the difference in dominate behavior verses friendly play or movement, then it is not a problem.** Same with letting your horse snack on a trail. I let my horse eat while I ride them. I am told that is bad, if you do this a horse will not go when you ask them, you will not be able to stop them, they will eat when they want to. Horse pucky!

If you are a good leader, then your horse will listen to you and will realize that you LET him eat when you want and when you say walk or don't eat they listen since you are the leader. If done right, I think this reinforces your position as leader more than it hurts it. Anytime your horse wants to do something and you stop it or make it do something else, you tell it you are still in charge and still the leader. People who don't understand this, take the safe and easy way and say, "I never let my horse eat when I ride". This works, but is a cheat and shows a lack of confidence in the rider. Riders do this all the time, my horse spooks at that area so I don't go over there, my horse does not like plastic so I stay away from plastic, my horse does not like other horses so I stay away, my horse does not like cantering so I only trot, can you see the trend. People can train their horse the way they want and many different things work, so you have to do what works for you. I think you improve your horsemanship when you to advance and do things different and try and get better results and require more from you and your horse.

**Riding a Scared Horse:** If a horse was abused, it does not know a good human. It thinks that all humans are mean, abusive, will hurt them and does not know how to react to them. Work on the trust and calmness on the ground. An abused horse needs time and understanding. Things only get worse when we are on a horse's back, so take your time on the ground. When you mount a horse, you give up almost all control you had on the ground and give more advantage to a scared horse. A horse is a reaction looking for a place to happen. They spook and react, it is how they stay alive in the wild. **Their instincts say when in doubt, run, don't think, just react and run to stay alive.** That is the way they are born and they are very good at it. We need to develop a relationship with a horse before we ride it so it will look to us when scared and not want to just run. If you ride a horse without a good foundation, you will always be a one wreck away from getting hurt or getting your horse hurt. Your goal is to get responses not reactions. Do not confuse discipline with abuse. Even abused horses needs discipline. Too many people want to be nice to abused horses and then the horse becomes dangerous and has to be put down. You do not help an abused horse by being nice. You help him by learning to understand him and by treating him like a horse, treat him like you are herd leader and high horses. If you just be nice the will be dangerous, aggressive and will become anti-social to humans and horses.

When a horse reacts, they are just being a horse and doing what Mother Nature told them to do, run first and think later to stay alive. If the horse was abused, all they know is someone has penned them up, neglected them, and taught them that humans are not their friends. You can change the way an abused horse sees you, but you have to work on not being a grabby-predator. Try to be a retreating, safe, non- threatening two-legged horse. The more a horse

makes you work, it teaches you to learn the horse way and will make you better for it, so enjoy small victories.

**Young Horses:** Remember a young horse can get hurt all by himself without any help from a human. If someone new to horses makes a mistake, the horse pays for it. If you care about a horse and you think you are over your head, get the assistance of a horseman (different than a trainer). Any true horseman is a trainer because they think like a horse. Actually, anyone around horses are trainers, some just don't know it. Because horses are so in-tuned to their surroundings, they are always learning. So anything you do around a horse, he learns. This can be good or bad, if you are doing the right thing, the horse learns well and if you do the wrong thing, the horse learns bad or worse gets hurt or killed, or even worse, hurts you or someone else. I am not trying to scare anyone form horses and I love horses and think they are kindest and greatest creatures on earth. However, horses are big, flighty, scared, and reactionary animals that move very fast and with a lot of power. Enjoy your horse but be aware that it can hurt you very bad, very quick and even thou he will not mean to hurt or kill you, it can happen. A horse will kill himself trying to save himself. An old horse saying "There are two kinds of horses, those that are hurt and those that will be hurt."

Young horses are very curious. This is good. Many people stop this and confuse this curiosity as disrespectful or bad behavior. Let your horse check out things and be curious. Horses love to play and this is all learning to them. If you only have one horse, I would suggest you get a sheep, cat, goat, or another horse. Horses are herd animals and when they are kept isolated, they develop bad habits and heath issues caused by stress. A horse can't sleep well and will not relax if alone. They need to know there is an extra set of eyes and ears to look out for danger so they can sleep and relax. Horse's like dogs, need a job. A horse in herd is either a leader or follower. This keeps them mentally fit and will help them stay safe and healthy.

Thinking like a horse is the key to understanding and having a good relationship with them. We have to think like a horse and not expect the horse to think like us. We are predator type animals and they are prey, they live in fear of being hurt, eaten or captured. There primary defense in life is their speed to run. Controlling that is not easy and it cannot be done with strength, it must be done by thinking and understanding. Horses do three things really well, they are run, eat and poop. Horses are scared and flight animals that run for safety and security. They will not eat unless they are relaxed and feel safe. If you just keep feeding a horse, they will eventually warm up to you. Do not confuse comfort with you as respect or love. If you are feeding them twice a day, it would be better to feed them smaller portions 3 or 4 times a day, the more they see you as a food provider and get use to you, the quicker they will feel safer with you.

The problem with this is once a horse feels safe and knows you won't hurt them, they have to try and dominate you so they can try and be higher in the pecking/social order. You don't want them to think this. So be aware as soon as they accept you and let you touch them, they may get a little pushy and start treating you like a lower horse. They are not being mean or bad, they are being a horse. They may pin their ears, try to bite you, spin their butt to you or even try to kick at you. This is all NORMAL horse behavior. You have to stop this immediately by showing dominance. The ears can mean different things, but the biting, pointing the butt at you or trying to kick is unacceptable and you have to stop this fast and aggressively. Remember to think like a horse, horses have little disagreements all the time, but it is handled fast and it's over fast, with no hard feelings. So if you have to correct aggressive behavior, do it and be done with it, it is not personal and the horse is just being a horse. Do it, forget it and move on like it never happened.

A horse was a horse from the time they were born. We do not have to teach a horse to be a horse. Horses test you, try new things, kick, bite, play and learn. You don't ever want to knock the playfulness or curiosity out of the horse. With young horses, people need to make sure they try everything before moving to force or fear. I am not a fan of stud chains, big bits, whips, or pain compliance for horses. With lots of handling and care, you can get anything done without damaging the partnership and relationship of your horse. [Western Horseman](#) has some good books about horses and they would help you understand and think like a horse. Don't be quite or sneaking around a horse. Drop things, drag things, knock over things, and then even if the horse reacts, keep doing what you are doing and be clam, as if you wanted it to happen. Your horse will think when you are around things always happen and it is no big deal. That way when something happens that you did not plan, the horse never knows the difference and will not react. The spookiest horses are the ones with owners that whisperer and move slow and protect the horse from everything scary and then the horse

learns to fear all things that he never sees or experiences.

**Nervous Horses:** A horse is a prey animal, we humans are predator animals, we do things completely different than prey animals. If you reach and try to grab, touch, pet or advance on a nervous horse, they will never let you touch them. Advance and retreat is the key. In fact, the retreat is more important of the two. Every time you move away, you tell the horse not to worry and that the horse is doing right. The shorter you do things the better. When you touch them, stop after the first touch (only a second) and calmly walk away. This tells the horse he gets release if lets you touch him. If you keep touching him until he leaves or moves away, you blew it. Now you taught him to leave you to get you to stop. So he thinks the right answer is to walk away from you. It sounds backwards but remember, think like a horse not a human. Always give back to the horse (release of pressure), they will learn much faster and it will improve your relationship rather than damaging it. This also tells the horse you understand horses and talk their language.

**Pony a Second Horse:** If you have two horses, taking both of them with you on rides helps you and your horses. It gives you the ability to exercise both horses, it allows you to work on handling two horses, gives your horse practice on being a pony horse and gets your horses so they can work together. However, if you are not comfortable with the horse you are riding, if you are frustrated and having training issues already, don't do this. Just because you can does not mean you should. When you pony another horse, you double your job. Now you have to control your horse and another horse. Now you have to be ready to deal with two horses spooking at different things and spooking or feeding off at each other. One horse will jack up the other horse and one horse will feed off the other. I see inexperienced riders do this and when things go bad guess who gets blamed? That's right, the Horse! So then you will see the horse being ridden getting yanked around and getting confused and pulled by the rider and the horse and then the rider will get nervous or frustrated and start taking it out on the horse. Then the other horse will get nervous and start to react and the rider will start yanking him around with the lead rope. The next thing you know both horses and rider are pissed, nervous and tense. And the lessons taught are mostly bad. So if you do this be aware that there will be problems and issues and that you have just doubled the pressure on your horses and yourself and you taken away your ability to concentrate on the horse you are riding, you now only have one hand for each horse and many other things change and can go bad fast. Here is a picture of my two boys on a recent beach trip. I am on Buddy and Tanner is the pony horse.



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## Understanding Herd Behavior

Horses are very social animals and they buddy up fast in a herd environment. They need to have extra eyes and ears in the wild to survive, so their herd instinct is very strong. I have two geldings, they are good buddies, hang out together and watch over each other. One is higher in the pecking order and one is lower, the pecking order is necessary for their survival. Only the strongest and smartest is in charge of the herd. Horses have instincts that tell them to test the leader and to try and move up in the pecking order. This ensures that only the smartest, strongest and bravest will reproduce and it keeps the herd safe and strong. This also teaches younger horses how to move, play, fight and push so they learn how to move up and become stronger minded and later in life become good head leaders. In the photo below you see the herd instinct is so strong that even horses swimming will herd together and find comfort and safety in numbers.



The basic herd has a high horse (lead), a low or bottom horse and horses in the middle. If you have two horses in a herd you have a one and two horse. If you have 10 horses in a herd, you have a one, two, three..... and ten horses. If two horses are close, lets say you know clearly who is one and who is two, but three and four seem to be equal? -- They are not, if you want to know who is three and who is four, pull them from the herd, put out a bucket of grain and the one that eats is three and the one who gets pushed off is four. You can do this with any horses to see who is higher and who is lower. This works with people too. If you cannot take the grain from a horse, he is higher and you are lower. This is key to remember in all contacts with horses. They either see you as higher or lower. If they push you, you are lower, if they pin their ears at you and try and push or intimidate you, you are lower, if they try and kick you, you are lower, if they try and bite you, you are lower, if they make you move out of their space, you are lower. If they make you flinch you are lower, if they make you nervous and jumpy you are lower. This is very important in dealing with horses. The reverse is also true. If you move them, you are higher, if you push them, you are higher, if you make them move or stop moving, you are higher, if you correct or discipline them, you are higher. It really is a very simple and accurate way of making sure who is in charge and making sure the strongest and smartest is in charge. Don't confuse this with being neurotic and always picking and pushing your horse "making him respect your space" all the time. That only shows fear and lack of trust and the horse will know the difference.

I did some research on **herd behavior in people** and found some really good examples. Click this link to read about [Herd Behavior In People](#)

This is not to be confused with what a lot of people think makes them higher. If you feed them, that does not make you higher, if you love them, that does not make you higher, if you groom them or give them treats, that does not make you higher. Anything you do that does not require a horse to submit to you, does not make you higher. However, everything you do that requires them to submit, tells them you are higher. The lack of understanding of this is what gets a lot of people in trouble and hurt with horses. Knowing what you are doing is very important to ensure you understand what you are teaching, what you are saying and what the horse is learning. Many times all three of these will be different and before you know it, you are saying my horse kicked me for no reason.....

Horses always do better if they are together with other horses. **A horse's instincts prevent him from being equal to another horse.** They must be higher or lower, so when people try to treat a horse like a pet, the horse will see this weakness and the horse will then think they have to be in charge, it is what horses do, the strongest has to take charge. When putting new

horses together they may have some issues at first, but they will work them out in a few days and once it is done, it is done, except for minor ear pinning and squeals. The bigger the herd the safer horses feel. More horses equal more eyes and ears to spot danger. In larger herds you may have smaller sub-herds where strong leaders have branched off and took a few mares with them. A lead horse and stud can only keep control of so many horses, so as the herd grows, it is easier for a few mares to be taken by another leader.

If you ever watch horses in a pasture, most will be eating, but one or two will have their head up looking around for danger. Even while eating they are all aware and looking for danger. Horses move slowly, eat slow and look around slowly. However, the second one horse spots danger or something unknown, his head will shoot up in the air fast and high to focus on the threat. This quick movement is a warning to all others. Within a second all horses will raise their heads to check out the danger and will look in the direction that the horse who warned is looking. Sometime a Stud or head horse will snort loud or blow to warn the herd and to warn the threat. When horses spot something new, they always conclude that it is danger until they prove otherwise. So when you hear someone call a horse spooky or scared all the time, that shows they do not understand horses. All horses are spooky, it is how they stay alive. Why do wild horses have such good feet? Because the horses with bad feet are never leaders, don't last as long, can't keep up with the herd, are usually eaten first by predators and don't get to reproduce. (Natural Selection 101) Only wild horses with good feet survive to reproduce and pass on the "**good feet**" gene. Why are horses so spooky? Same exact reason, the non-spooky horses are too slow to react, too calm, do not run or react fast enough and are eaten first, so they are not around long enough to pass on the "**calm and non-spooky**" gene. Fear, alertness and fast reactions keeps horses alive. Which is why you should never blame a horse for being scared or fearful, it is there nature.

If you understand a horse you will know that you can't make a request half way and accept half right answers. There can only be one right answer in order to be consistent and so you don't confuse the horse. Sounds and words have to mean the same thing every time or they lose meaning and will mean nothing. A kiss means canter to my horses, period. I see so many people that want a kiss to mean run, move, come, look at me, people kiss to say hello to a horse, to get a horse's attention and then get mad at the horse if he does not know what a kiss means. One sound for one action. The same thing with a click. One well known clinician, uses clicks for everything. He clicks to move a horse, he clicks to get a horse's attention, he clicks to trailer load, he clicks and clicks and the horse still does what he wants. Then people who watch him do what he does and it does not work. Horses learn to adapt so they will learn to ignore cues that mean nothing or that mean too much and have no meaning. Be aware of what you do and what you are teaching, awareness will improve your horsemanship skills.

This picture below is a good example of a herd with a look out horse. The dark brown horse who is standing (Big T or Tanner) is my mustang.



Tanner is standing guard and watching over the (his) herd. The horse on the left, that looks dead is my other horse, Buddy. It is easy to see that Buddy is very relaxed and calm with his "dead horse" imitation. Tanner, on the other hand, is alert, not relaxed and ready for a reaction to any sign of danger. You will not see Tanner sleep like Buddy. The horse on the right, Lacy, is aware of my approach but not threatened enough to stand. The white (Gray) horse, Fury, is aware of me but looking off without concern. This is a great example of how the herd works together to stay safe. Three horses get to rest and relax while one stands guard. All horses feel safe since they have multiple eyes and ears keeping guard. Even thou Buddy appears

"dead" asleep, he will hear and feel if any horse stands up rapidly, runs off or snorts a warning. When a 1000 pound hoof hits the ground it makes a distinct sound and the vibrations are sent through the ground for others to feel. Another warning signal which helps keep the herd safe.

**\*\*[Watch a video of approaching horses in a herd: Click Here](#)**

A horse without a herd is a very sad thing for any horse lover. Horses feel alone, unsafe and are always nervous. They are lost without a herd leader, friends to groom, friends to play with and no one to watch over them so they cannot sleep and relax. Imagine if you were taken away from all people and you were put in a cage where lions could walk up to you, push you around, make you scared all the time and you knew they could eat you at anytime. Your life would not be much fun. Many horses live each day like this. Horses need other horses to socialize, be with their own kind, make each other feel comfortable and enjoy all the benefits from the safety and security of the herd. Herds are very structured to prevent problems and maintain order. Each horse knows his place and respects each others place. It can be tough to watch, but it works for the good of the herd. A weak lower horse will not be allowed to eat where a higher horse is eating and cannot drink until all higher horses are done or allows him to eat or drink. This order, once established, keeps the herd calm and in order. However, if a horse is removed or new horse is introduced, then the herd structure is upset and thrown off balance. All horses need to confirm their position and or fight to maintain their previous position. This will cause fights to get more severe because horses are worried about losing their position or keeping their position. All normal horse behavior that is required to ensure the herd has



You may see horses in herds always standing in the open, away from shelter and shade. If you look at most pictures of herds, they will be in open land or open areas. That is where they feel safest. They can see predators approaching or signs of danger and have lots of room to run and use their speed to escape at any sign of danger. Lots of people wonder why horses stand in the rain, out in open when they have good shelter available. This is why, shelter means they are trapped, they are in an enclosed place where they cannot see as good and cannot run as easy. Over time a horse may feel safe enough to stand in a shelter or enclosed area, but only after he is convinced that he is safe and will not get eaten. The horse is best teacher of the horse, by watching them in the herd we can learn so much more. Horses do things for a reason, normally they do things from instincts not by mistake. All horses kick and all horses get kicked. All horses bite and all horses get bitten. Knowing this helps you understand horses.

They are not being mean or aggressive, or bullies or anything else. Horses are horses and that is all they know. Not understanding them and getting caught up in their kindness and beauty can lead people down a road that will get them hurt. By being too easy, too nice and never requiring anything from a horse, you tell the horse you are weak, you are not a strong leader and that you are lower in the pecking order than they are. That is when a horse starts treating you like a lower horse and part of his herd. Once a horse sees you as a lower member of their herd, they will expect you to act like a lower member. They will expect you to move when they tell you and if you don't, they will discipline you, just like they would a lower horse. So when people say my horse kicked me for no reason. They just don't understand horses. The horse has good reason to discipline his herd. If danger comes he has to know that his herd will follow him and listen to him, so to increase the chances of survival of the entire herd. So when a horse kicks or bites another horse, he is just acting like a horse. Which is all a horse knows how to be. You have to understand them so you can help them.

**\*\*** A horse feels security in numbers and fear in isolation, isolate him and he will want to join up with any other creature, even a human predator.

Moving horses in and out of the herd will sometimes slow the pecking order process down and cause more problems and more fights. Every time a horse is removed or added to the herd it creates confusion and the pecking order changes. Horses will always be trying to either establish or re-establish their position. Feeding is another issue that causes hard feelings and hurt horses. When feeding horses in a herd, you should have multiple piles and locations for food, that way horses can get pushed off one pile and will still



have another pile to move to and eat. This also encourages movement and higher horses will walk to check out each pile of food, looking for the best. (Hence the old saying: The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence) Piles of food must be far enough a part to prevent horses from getting kicked by a horse at a different pile. Some horses will try and control two or more piles,

so if they are too close, this will happen. If they are far enough apart, this will not be worth the effort and soon the horses will learn that when pushed off one pile they simply move to another pile.

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Horses maintain strict discipline within the herd. If a horse acts out, disrespects the leader or puts the herd in danger, the lead horse can and will kick the horse out of the herd. The horse being kicked out or kept out of herd at a distance will be at greater risk to being eaten. It will be eaten first, it will not be able to relax or rest, it will be stressed without its buddies and will want back into the herd. The lead will not only keep the scolded horse out, but he will also keep other horses from going out to visit. This could go on for 10 minutes to several hours.

The ousted horse will ask for forgiveness by looking in towards the leader, with a more submissive posture and expression. (Like a horse will do to you when you round pen him) You will see this form of behavior when a new horse is introduced to a herd. The young or new horses will want to go visit, but the mothers and herd leader will not allow it and will chase the new horse away. This may continue for a few days depending on the new horse. The quicker the new guy can convince the leader that he respects him and is not a threat, then he



will be allowed access to the safety and protection of the herd, where it is safer and more secure. The new horse will have to do this with each and every horse. While this is going on, the new horse will be testing each horse to see if he can move them or push them, if he does, then he knows he is higher than horse in the pecking order. Understanding this and how a herd works will stop people from calling horses mean, bossy or aggressive. Horses only know how to be horses. They have to test their leaders, that includes you, and they see the world as a herd. When you are with your horse, you are a herd of two. You have to be the leader and higher than your horse. So when your horse tests you, he is not being mean, he is doing only what he knows, he has to test his leader to make sure he has a strong and smart leader. If you show him that you are strong, then he will not test you as much and will accept you as higher in the pecking order than he is. It is every horse's goal to move up in the pecking order. They all want to be in charge if they can. There are many benefits to being the High Horse. He gets to eat first, eat the best food, drink first, he moves where he wants, when he wants and everyone respects his space and will not challenge him. So if you are the lead, a lower horse will not kick you, will not bite you or strike you, unless you miss his tests and allow him to push you, then he thinks you are telling him that you are lower, you do not want to be leader anymore or that you cannot be the leader anymore, you tell him you are not a strong leader and he will think he has to take charge to keep his herd of two, you and him, safe. Then when you do not listen to him or move when he tells you to move and you do not respect him, then he will treat you like he would treat any lower horse, he will pin his ears, bite you, kick you or charge you. He will move you to show you he is the leader and he is higher. He is NOT being mean, he is just being a normal horse. He will do to you what you should be doing to him, if you were higher.

### Mares Do Not Run Herds

There is a common misconception in the horse world that a Mare will always be the lead horse or in charge of a herd. **Let me be clear, A Stallion runs the herd, he goes where he wants, when he wants, and no other horse tells him No, period!** This incorrect belief comes from watching wild herd behavior. You see, the Mares would always be in the herd for the longest period of time, in the wild. There are no Geldings in the wild. Young males are kicked out of the herds when young, by the Stallion, so they do not compete with the stud or breed any of the Mares. So most herds are all Mares and one Stallion. The Studs or Stallions would only be around for a few years or less at their peak before being replaced by a younger and stronger Stud. It is very hard and demanding work to be in charge of a herd. The Stallion is far too busy breeding, watching out for trouble, protecting his herd, marking his area and many other duties. He does not have time for minor herd decision so **"he allows"** the Mare to take care of many herd issues. This is why people that do not understand horses, think the Mare runs the herd. Since Mares are not kicked out of the herd, the Mares would be around the longest and would have the most continuity in the herd. Their position in the herd was always well established and the lead Mare had been around the longest and her position was clear. This is not so nowadays. More and more Geldings are establishing themselves as herd leaders. A big problem is herds today are not allowed to be consistent since too many people want to put their horse up at night. This keeps a constant unbalance in the herd and more fights and challenges continue to occur since the herd is never constant. Since Geldings are with the herd and are not replaced or kicked out by stallions, they will assume the lead position and will keep it. (Of course the smart Geldings still let the Mares think they are in charge :) People say Gelding fight more in herds, that is not true. Geldings are always trying to move up, so the more people want to move horses in out, put them up at night, protect horses by moving horses that fight out of the herd and other stupid things, this increases problems and only makes the herd more unstable and end up causing more and worse fights. But the same one's that cause this are the same one's that will blame the horse just for being a horse.

I recently noticed a different situation in pecking order. I have four horses in a small sub-herd within a herd. I have a clear number one horse, however, two three and four horse is not consistent. Buddy is higher than Fury and will push Fury off food and move him. Lacy will push Buddy. So you would think Lacy would push Fury, not so. Lacy pushes Buddy, Buddy pushes Fury, Fury pushes Lacy and so on. This conflicts with the theory that there is strict



order, but implies that the order depends on what horses are involved. I think this is because Fury and Lacy have a longer existing relationship and their order was established long ago and is maintained or continued. When Buddy was introduced, he moved Fury, another gelding, but could not move Lacy, a mare. So, Lacy is higher than Buddy and Buddy is higher than Fury and Fury is higher than Lacy. I know, I am confused as well. It sure is interesting to watch. Horses will always be horses and they play and juggle for positions. Pasture is the best place for your horse, even if there is conflict. Pasture is good for their feet, good for their mental health, good for their diet, and good for their social skills. The last thing I

would do is consider removing a horse from pasture to a stall. Put horses out in pasture and let them work it out and be horses, things will settle down quicker than you think. We sometimes prolong and make the process worse by trying to help or protect them. Horses are happiest when they work this out on their own and find their place in the herd. **(NO REAR SHOES FOR HORSES IN PASTURE)**

Now, if you have a horse that is the lead mare in pasture, she may want to continue this lead position with you. This is unacceptable. You must be number one when with your horse. Herd behavior can be tough to watch sometime, but it is the way of the horse. An aggressive gelding is being a horse and protecting his herd and mares. Other factors may be at play with an aggressive gelding. How old is the other geldings, how long has he been with mares, was he cut late, and other things. Pulling horses in and out of the herd



and keeping them in a stall at night and then letting them out during the day only prolongs the pecking order disputes. There is an old saying that goes "Horses vote everyday for their leader". They test, they try and move up and they make sure the leader is still the strongest today. A herd leader that gets hurt will quickly be replaced by the number two horse in the herd. After the lead gets better, he will have to fight, push and show the new leader that he is better, stronger before he will be allowed to regain his position as leader. It is not personal, it is not mean, it protects and prolongs the herd. You see, when a leader gets old and is unable to defend his position, the number two, who is stronger, younger and more able to protect the herd is now in charge. So even though the old leader is pushed down, he still gets the protection of the new leader and the herd. He helped train the new leader, he is responsible for the new leader being as good as he is and knowing what he knows. There are no losers in a herd. This is why horses do so well in the wild and thrive, this and the fact, that humans stay out of it. It is a simple process that is very successful. If people understood this more, they would understand how to deal with their horse better, the horse would respect them better and the person would know that when a horse tests them, they are making them better. I got a question about two gelding that would not get along. Here was my suggestion.

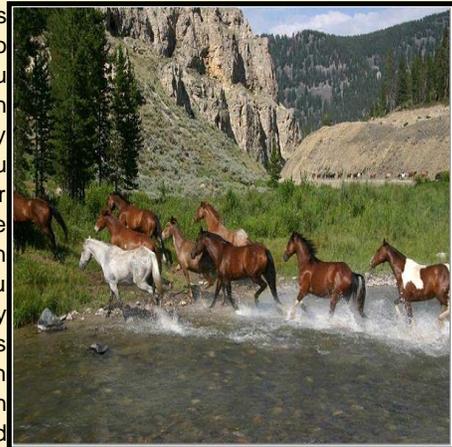
Two Geldings: Not sure how much control you have or what your options are, but here are a few ideas for two geldings that can't get along. Put the two geldings together without the mares, this would remove the drive to have or control the mares and both gelding will soon be buddies. Another option is move the aggressive gelding out for a few days and let the milder gelding bond with the mares, that may calm things down a bit. If you are not leaving them all together all the time, I would suggest that. If you are doing that, then make sure and feed them differently, making different piles of food available. Never put all the food in one spot, this always creates hard feelings and will cause disputes.

If both geldings tie good (will stand without pulling when tied to a secure point), then I would tie them both, with a short rope, next to each other, just enough to hold their head naturally, and let them spend some stand time together. They will not have food or mares to fight over and this will equal the playing field so they can get to know each other. Don't leave them alone at first in case they get into a kicking match. If they get aggressive when you tie them together, stand by with a plastic bag on a stick. Stand behind them and if they try to kick each other or fight, wave the bag, this will distract them and they will be more worried about you and the bag and not each other. Make sure you move the bag and put pressure from behind them so you don't cause them to pull and test the tie point and possibly break free.



Feeding in a Herd: When feeding horses in a herd, always put many different small piles of food far apart. (Far enough that one horse cannot kick another horse at a different pile) This does many things. This always leaves food for the low horse that gets pushed off and he can just go to another (far) pile and eat. It also makes horses move around while eating, since they will want to check out each pile, which is good for their feet and digestion. It will also allow horses to buddy up and eat with their special friend and the other horses have other options. The disputes will be less since the horse has a place to go and eat and they do not have to fight to eat. By feeding in one pile or one location, all of these benefits are lost and the fights get more intense as the hungry horse get hungrier and the vet bill gets larger.

Pushy Horse: When having a problem with a horse always rule out pain for the cause of these behaviors, then you can address the issues. Horses are not being mean when they fight for position. They are being a horse. A horse thinks you are part of his herd. You don't want a horse to think that he is higher in pecking order than you are. You have to change that by moving his feet. In the horse world, the one that moves his feet away first is lower. When you back away from him or you move away, you tell him he is higher and smarter than you are. In addition, since you tell him that, he thinks he has to be in charge. Try keeping him on a lead rope where you can control his head. You should be able to back him and turn him by walking to his rear and moving his head towards his butt. Every time you make him move, you gain higher status to him. Every horseman needs to learn to think like a horse if you want to have a good loving relationship with your horse. He does not know people language and it is up to us to learn horse language so you can talk horse.



A herd member can get pushed out of the herd if they are bad, disrespectful or endanger the herd. This is a way to ensure herd integrity. I have seen this in different situations, one time I was working with a horse that was not handled and was pulling and not leading. It reared up and got away from me (my fault not the horse's) anyway this horse ran back to herd for safety and was panicking about the rope dragging. She kept running around the herd thinking the rope was chasing her, so started a mini stampede and all the horses were panicking. I would try and get to her and she would run to the herd for protection and the herd would run from her in a panic, it was quite the scene. After I was able to get the rope, I worked with her and all was well. When I let her go the herd was still upset with her and let her know it. There were babies in the herd and she had ran around them, chased the herd, endangered the herd and the rope had dragged and got on the other horses and I can only describe it as the herd was pisses at her.



I watched the lead horse keep her outside the herd for about three or four hours. If she tried to come in, she would be aggressively chased out and made to stand outside the safety of the herd. You could tell she was nervous and insecure about being kept out, but every time she tried to return to the herd, she was pushed harder and disciplined for trying to return.

After she stopped trying to come in, stood on the outside with a submissive look, her head down and kept asking permission nicely if she could return, the herd allowed her to re-enter. This was extremely interesting to watch. It was very structured and nothing was by accident. Every horse knew what was going on, the babies were leaning as they watched and the entire herd was on line and cooperating.

**In the wild, a horse needs the herd for safety,** if a pack of predators attack they will go after the weak or old or the lone horse. So not being allowed in a herd is not good for your survival. So to survive in the wild, you need to be social and be a member of a herd if you want to survive. If you are alone, you cannot rest, sleep, eat, relax and look for danger, which is why it is important to remember that a lone horse is not a good thing and the horse will suffer. In the photo below is a horse that was attacked by cougar. You can bet this horse was either alone or tied up or caged in so it could not run and that is how this cougar got this horse. Notice how thin this horse's neck is and the lack of crest or muscle. This horse is very under weight and probably could not defend itself which is another reason he got attacked.



The term herd sour is a little unfair to the horse. All horses are herd sour or buddy sour and all horses are spooky. These things keep horses alive in the wild. A horse that is not spooky (Aware and ready to run) in the wild will be eaten and will die soon, so the calm gene is never passed on, since non spooky horses don't live too long. The horses that are aware and know to run at the first sign of danger live longer and pass on that "spooky or alert" gene, so only spooky (aware and ready to run) horses survive.

Same with herd sour, without a herd a horse is soon a meal. A lone horse cannot eat, rest, survive and look for danger. So horses that are not buddy sour (want to be with other horses) are eaten first and don't live long. So only the horses that live in a herd and stay close to other horses live and that gene is passed on to future generations.

#### **How to Act like a Lead Horse in a Herd:**

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Lead horses push other horse if they get pushed. Lead horses don't try and be nice or make friends; they are ready to push any other horse away if that horse does not respect them by walking up politely and respectfully or staying away until invited in. Older horses will allow younger horses to come in and get away with some things, but will give the young one a lesson if he gets too pushy. So when you go out into a herd of horses, you need to walk with direction, standing tall, looking in control, with a lead rope in you in your hand ready to swing it, ready to get big (jump, raise your hands, yell, look mean, attack if necessary). So if a horse runs at you, tries to push you, tries to intimidate you, approaches you with ears back, throws their head at you or tail swishes you, then you need to get big, just big enough to push them. But big enough to make them move away from you, enough to put pressure to make them move out of your space or away from you. Every time you do this you tell that horse and others that you are higher, you are a leader and they must not challenge you or you will make them run, move and put pressure on them. Worst thing you can do when in a herd is to move away, back away, look scared, let them move you, run away, or allow a horse to put pressure on you, then you teach them to push you and treat you like a lower horse. You teach them to test humans, you teach them that they can move and be higher than humans. These are very bad lessons. That is why when people go out to herd and try and bribe a horse with grain, they end up teaching other horses bad lessons. When people run from horses in a pasture they teach horses to chase people. When people are scared of horses and act like they are scared, they teach horses that people are weak, lower and are not good leaders. Confidence and action teach horses to respect, lack of confidence, lack of action and fear teaches horses to be aggressive and to disrespect people. Every thing a horse does is because of what people do.

Horses are commonly said to like things when in fact they have learned to accept things. Since they are not fighting animals they look and live to avoid pressure, so they accept things very easily. Since they accept things, people confuse this with they like it. Here is an answer to a question about my horse likes to be patted like a dog:

**Answer:** Patting is a people thing, I do it and try to do it lightly, but it is how people show affection to dogs and even cats, but people don't walk up to other people and pat them, they only do it to mainly dogs and since people think having a horse is like having a dog, so we are comfortable patting, but you will never see a horse pat another horse, that is a predator type action, prey animals move slower, are more sensitive, use rubbing, stroking and nuzzling to greet or show affection. Give a horse a light hug can be OK but is you squeeze too tight the horse will feel trapped. Rub a horse with your cheek, pet or stroke him rhythmically in a calming way and they will enjoy that better since it is more close to the way they show

affection. Horses are incredibly accepting and forgiving. That is why we can ride them, saddle them and control them. They accept just about anything. So a horse that gets patted all the time, they learn to accept it, they learn to ignore it, so to a person that does not know, they will think the horse likes it, simply because the horse does not fight it, move from or try to stop it, that is not so, the horse has simply accepted it. I hear people, all the time, say my horse loves to be ridden, my horse loves to do barrels, my horse loves to jump, all are not true, all of these things put pressure, pain and force a horse to work. But people that do not truly understand horses, think the horse likes something since he accepts. All human emotions. Horses want to feel safe, be with a herd, graze and play. That is what they do when we are NOT involved. So I try NOT to be too human, since a horse is what attracts me to the horse, I don't want to spoil that or remove what a horse really is. So patting is not "horrible", it is just not what horses do to each other, so I try not to do it.

Thinking like a horse makes you see horses totally different and understand why they do what they do and why they are the way they are. They really are remarkable animals!

I did several videos on herd behavior. However this video of horses allows you to see it first hand. In this video you will see a stallion killed a unhealthy baby and will see horses that were struck by lightning and many other horse and herd behavior. Watch this video to see true wild herd behavior. [. Click Here to view Wild Mustang Herd Behavior Video](#)

Here is a question and answer I got about herd behavior:

**Question:** I've been trying to research more about herd dynamics on the internet but haven't come across any really good information or studies that have been done. I'm interested in the situation of the older horse that has missed the social herd training that foals naturally learn growing up in a herd environment. My question is what can be done for the horse that hasn't been raised with other horses? Is there a 'window' of opportunity that is permanently missed, or can these herd behaviors still be learned with the older horse?

**Answer:** Horses are the best teacher of the horse. I do not think there is a window or point of no return, I think herd behavior is instinctive with the horse from birth. Of course it is developed and made better from experience. A horse that is only with a herd part time, like the current trend of locking horses up at night in a stall (cell), and then letting them out during the day, creates new problems and issues. Anytime a horse is put with different horses a social hierarchy has to be worked out. Since this has to happen every time, this creates some anti herd behavior, it is normally worked out pretty fast, but anytime this happens it increases the chance of an accidental broken leg or cut. Of course the risk goes up even higher with you throw stupid rear metal shoes in the mix. In the wild there are no shoes so hooves do not cut or break bones and the impact is not as damaging. Horses vote EVERYDAY for leader. Not to be mean, not to have ego, but for the survival and benefit of the herd. So if a lead horse is a strong leader and gets spooked, steps in a hole and injures his leg. The second the number two horse sees the lead horse limping, he will see the weakness, he sees the chance to move up to number one and will do so, he may go push the hurt leader, Not to be mean, not to pick on the weak, but because a horse has a need, urge, instinct and drive to move up and be leader (IN THE ABSENCE OF LEADERSHIP). This is key, if no leader is leading, the horse will instinctively push and attempt to take the leadership role. Again, not because it is mean, not because it is a man's horse or a woman's horse, not because it was abused, not because it had bad training, not because it had a mom that abandoned him and not from all the other excuses that people want to blame on the horse. It is pure and it is predictable. All horses are leaders and followers, I think they would rather follow since it is easier and less work.

The benefits of being a leader is they get to eat first and best, they get to drink first and they get to move when and where they want without being pushed or having to yield to other horses. The cons are much more, the leader takes on the responsibility of safety and protection of his herd, he must always be vigilant, on guard, he can not relax, he can not drop his guard, he must be ready to defend his position and take on all challengers. This is very tiring work, but necessary to keep his skills honed. All this defending and alertness makes him better, stronger and keeps him in great shape, all of which benefit the entire herd. So even the horses that challenge the leader are part of his success since they keep him on his toes and always make sure he is up to the job. People who don't understand horses want to take these challenges, pushes, threats and ear pinning as mean, disrespectful and want to make it personal, so you get yahoos who want to tell everyone to make a horse "respect your space" and it becomes a fight or personal, when it is really nothing more than a horse being a horse.

So back to can a horse learn this later, I think they always know it, but it just has to be refreshed. Horses learn at such an incredible level. I think this is due to their keen sense of awareness, being prey animals, their life depends on them being aware and seeing everything. Missing something can cost them their life, so with this type of strong motivation, they learn very fast and don't miss much. That is why they are called "Professional People Trainers". People that don't know and don't understand horses, don't realize that they are giving hundreds of signals about them every time they are with a horse, they tell about their knowledge, about their fears and insecurities and many other things, so people want to label a horse, mean, pushy, stubborn and other names, all wrong, a horse is only a horse and that is all they know how to be.

With that being said, I believe that if you put a horse with other horses they will fit in and become a herd in short order. There will be pushing matches, there will be some bites and kicks, but all are normal and these tests each horse, to see where each horse fits in. Horses are masters of adapting to changes, they accept anything, which is why they are abused so easily. So put any horse with other horse and they will teach him, the horse will learn and harmony will be achieved very quickly. However, get people involved, get someone who wants to protect their "baby", get someone who thinks they are needed to keep things in control, get someone who wants to stop the natural horse behavior and you get problems and hurt horses.

Put horses with horse and they always do fine. But if you ask a horse owner "that has owned horses their entire life" they will tell you it is Them that keep the horses safe and "in control" and they believe without them, the horses would just kill each other. All BS of course, but there are many more people that think they know horses than there are people that really know horses.

Hope this helps,

Rick

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**Horse's talk vocally in various ways.** The following are different ways horse's communicate with each other with sound:

**Ears:** Of course most horse communication is done with body, ears, tail and head. **See the image of ears to the right.**

[Click Here for Detail Info on Horse Ears](#)

**Nicker:** Very affectionate and is normally a sign of friendship and even courtship between horses. A mare will nicker at her foal to get the foal to come or to call it away from danger.

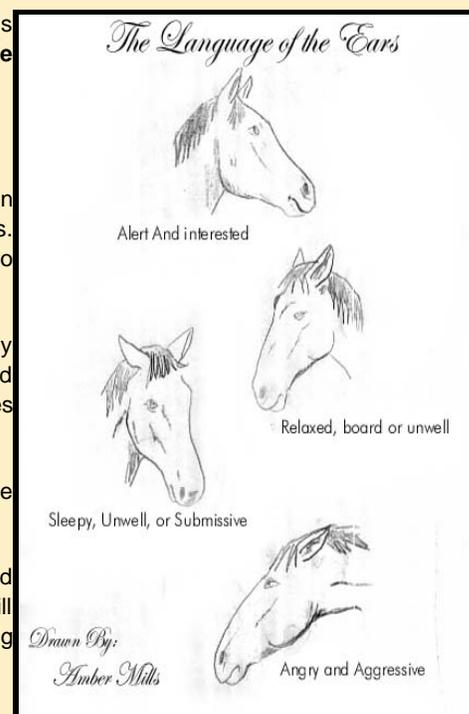
**Neigh:** Longer and louder than a nicker, normally calls to herd or buddy when separated. It is used to locate or call to each other at greater distances than a nicker.

**Whinny:** This is a gentler and sadder neigh. More upset and sad calling.

**Nicker:** This is normally a greeting, low sound used between two friends. Your horse will normally do this when you are feeding or giving bringing them food.

**Squeal:** Normally make by the mare but gelding do it as well. It is defensive and is normally done when two horses are meeting or smelling each other. It could be an attempt to show dominance and not weakness or to try and establish that I am higher than you or don't mess with me.

**Blow:** This is just a way to express a release of tension. By exhaling air, the horse releases



tension. Could be just clearing out the air way.

**Snort:** This is a strong exhale or air that sounds loud and worried. It can be low if a horse is close to danger or something that is scary to the horse. The first time a horse is exposed to a plastic tarp will normally get this sound. However it will be a low sound. If a horse sees a threat at a greater distance, then the sound is much louder and more a warning to other horses and the threat. If a horse squares off on you and snorts, be very careful, he is about to go into attack mode if he cannot run or flee.

\*\* This is a great link to a site where Natural Horsemanship is explained very well and almost exactly how I would describe it. [Visit Link Here](#)

### **Sacking Out**



**If you don't understand this topic - the above picture will be You!**



### **Sacking Out Horses:**

This is an old term used to expose a horse to a sack, bag or other scary object in an attempt to desensitize the horse to a specific object, to build trust with your horse, teach the horse to stand when scared rather than react and to show him that you will not hurt him. This can be



done with a plastic bag, rag, shirt, paper bag, stick, whip, plastic bottles, blanket, umbrella, kite, tarp, ball, rope or anything the horse appears to be scared of or reacts to. The goal is to slowly expose the horse to the object for a short time, in a non-threatening way and then remove it before the horse gets scared and reacts. If you keep it too close or too long and the horse gets scared, you cannot remove it while the horse is scared and reacting or you teach it to be scared. Go slow and remember the goal, "to remove fear and not create fear." It is best to let the horse smell it (don't shove it in his face or up his nose) and then remove it while the horse is standing still. If you remove it when the horse is standing still,

you teach the horse if he stands still then the scary object will move away and will not hurt him. You teach him that you can create fear and scary things and you can stop or remove the scary thing. Read my recent article on [why sacking out is so important.](#)

Sacking out is also important to train you. You may ask why would I need to be sacked out?



That is not what you are getting trained in. While your horse is getting sacked out, you are learning to read your horse. You are learning how your horse handles fear. You are learning at what point your horse blows, so you can stop before it happens. You will see signs of his fear, how he reacts, how it grows and how he blows. Your goal is not to get him to blow, but you will cause it by trying to go too fast or too long. When your horse blows, make note of it so you can predict it later, so you can stop pressure before he blows next time. The more you observe your horse and

his fear the better you will be able to see this when you are riding him later. The better you deal with his fear, the better you will deal with it when you are riding him. You will become more confident and will know your horse better, know how to read him better, know how to predict his response, know when to get involved and know what your horse is capable of handling. This is such an important step in owning a horse and lots of people skip it or don't understand it. Sack out your horse, learn his fear, learn how to deal with and help your horse deal with it. You do this by doing it, seeing it, experiencing it and seeing the results of your actions.

Always make the scary object as small as you can and the least scary at first. For instance fold a bag in half, in half again, and in half again. When it is small, rub it on the horse until he gives no reaction. Take it away often, pet, and reassure the horse for not reacting. Then unfold

it once and rub it all over him again, then unfold again and it will be full size. If you try full size at first, you may scare the horse and make his fear worse. Remember the goal, to remove fear in the horse and not to create it. Get a soft blanket and fold it as small as you can fold it, let the horse sniff it and slowly rub it all over the head, neck, and body. (Do the head last since that is where the horse will be most scared) Use the blanket as if you would a grooming brush. Once you do that, unfold it once (not full size) and rub it again all over, once this is good,



unfold again and repeat until the blanket is totally ignored. Then do the same thing with a sweater, a shirt, a paper bag and then you can start to introduce a saddle. This may take a week or so, but don't rush it, if the horse is acting scared of the saddle, and you rush this, it will only make the first rides fearful and it will take twice as long to get the horse where you can ride it. Not to mention that you are much more likely to get bucked off by a scared horse than any other type of horse. Short training sessions are best, don't try and do it all in one hour.

Your goal with a horse should always be to take the fear out of the horse, never to instill fear or correct or hurt the horse for being fearful or scared. It is OK if your horse gets scared, all horses do. You just have to teach your horse to handle his fear differently. Mother Nature tells the horse to RUN when scared, don't think, don't look, don't stand still, JUST RUN to live. So, you have to get your horse to ignore this instinct and to do the opposite. You want him to think, you want him to look and NOT to run. If the horse hates a whip, he may have been beat



with it and he sees the whip as pain and being hit. If a horse likes being groomed, groom him with a whip around. At first just lay it next to him, slowly hold it while you groom, then after a few times, use it to groom him, rub it on him, hold it in your hand while you rub your hand on him, get him to ignore it and maybe to think he likes it. After a few days of this, then hold it far away from him and while you rub him with one hand, move the whip up and down with the other hand, he may spook at first but don't react to his spook and just keep calmly rubbing him. After he is good with that, slowly progress to moving the whip fast until he ignores it moving. Then move it fast and then touch him softly, then hit the whip on the ground while you rub him, soon he will not care about the whip or what you do with it. Always start slow and as far away from the horse as you can, then slowly move closer and faster. Sacking out has a lot to do with

reading the horse and timing. You have to be able to predict when the horse is about to react and stop before the reaction. Your goal is the get the horse to think: If I stand still, the scary thing will go away; If I stand still my human friend will make the scary object go away; When I get scared, if I look to my leader (you) then I never get hurt and everything will be OK.

Never use the whip to lunge a horse that is scared of a whip. You would be reinforcing the fear and his flight response. don't use a whip to move the horse or to hit him, only use it to rub him, hit the ground and to massage him with it. After you are sure he knows it will not hurt him, and then you can start using it to get him to move. When horses are young, it is the best time to expose them. You can really make a big impact on future training by exposing the little ones to everything. I like soft ropes. I wrap it around the ears, about the head, feet, body (cinch area) back legs, etc. I want the horse to know that no matter what touches him anywhere, **when he is with me, he is safe.**

Don't go too fast and scare him but touch him on every inch of his body. Try to find a special spot he likes, bond with him by gaining his trust. Once you can do anything with your hands anywhere on the body, do it again with a rope, and then with a whip, then with a stick, then with a plastic bag, a



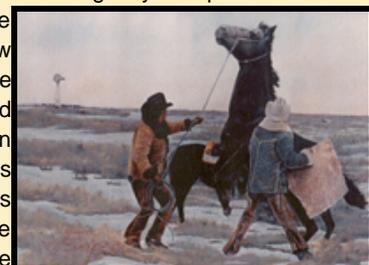
paper bag and so on. The more things you touch him with the better. Every day he will trust you more and more. A soft rope is a wonderful thing. The more the horse is conditioned to being touched anywhere, the less chance you will get bad reaction when something accidentally touches him.



You want your horse to think, when he is with you, weird things happen, crazy things happen, things are thrown over him, things are tossed under him, things are dragged by him, things are dropped, all kind of scary things happen when you two are together. Soon your horse will not care what happens and when something does happen, he will think you are testing him again. He will think that you make it happen and if he stands still, like he has done 1000 times before, you will make the scary thing go away and he will not get hurt. Then when something happens out of your control, your horse will never know it and think you are giving him another scary test.

If a horse is reacting to you touching a certain part (butt, legs, tail) then he needs some desensitizing. I would normally tell you to use a whip as an extension of your hand and rub the horse with it all over. However, that only works if the horse does not know what a whip is. If someone has ruined the horse with a whip, you will have to desensitize him to the whip first.

If you have to discipline a horse, you can use a lead rope for emergency discipline. Since it is used more for leading, you always have it with you, the horse is used to it and not scared of it, the chances are low that you will ruin the horse to the rope, unless you over use it. That way the horse is used to seeing the lead rope and he will not react to it with fear. A pop on the butt or pop on the ground will get his attention if needed. As with all things if you use it all the time for everything it will lose it's meaning. After you use it for discipline, do a little desensitizing with it, rub it on him softly and make sure he knows that the rope is not only used to pop him. In the picture above this horse is being scared and not sacked out properly. The blanket is being forced and not presented, they are creating fear and not removing it. They are forcing the horse not teaching the horse to trust them. They are creating fear and not removing it.



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Take your time and every thing you show the horse, that you will not hurt him, it will make each additional thing less fearful, and you will be building trust with your horse. Soon no matter what you rub on your horse he will not react. Then you get to play the game, "I wonder what I can use to get a reaction."

There is a thing called flooding. This is a more aggressive sack out technique and can be useful, but should not be used without understanding it. Flooding is exposing the horse to a scary thing continuously until it stops showing fear. You have to make sure the horse is secured so it can not get away or it will learn to fear the object. I do not like this technique because it causes fear in the horse. Your goal should always be to remove fear. However, some time a horse needs to get scared in order to know that he does not have to be scared. You just have to be very careful with this. I use it after a horse is good at a few things and then I add them together. Like if a horse is good with a plastic bag, feed sack and whip, then I will tie the horse, put feed



sacks under him, have the plastic bag in one hand and the whip in the other. Then I flood them with several items that they already know. I think this sets the horse

up for success rather than failure. Some people use the flooding technique and if the horse continues to show fear for a long time, they stop. Very bad lesson. Never start something with a horse unless you plan on finishing it. This is more of an advanced sack out so don't try it too soon. Some other advance things I do is after my horse is good with a plastic bag, I carry one when I ride. While riding I swing the bag around while the horse ignores it and shows no reaction to it. I also have a whip that I have tied a plastic bag to the end. It is like a fishing pole with a bag at the end. This really spooks a lot of horses. The bag flies in the air, hits the ground, makes loud noises and appears to be chasing or flying at the horse. If you get your horse good enough, you can ride with this and fly the plastic bag around as your ride. This will go a long way helping you horse understand that no matter what happens, when he is with you, he is safe.



When starting a new horse, before putting a saddle on you should be able to jump on the horse bare back. The horse should allow you to lay on his back and slide off him by sliding backwards and landing behind his butt. This is something you should continue to do even after



your horse is finished. Another thing you can do to make sure your horse is good and sacked out is tail work. A horse should allow you to raise his tail without resistance. At first he will resist since this is odd and new, but after a while he should allow you to lift his tail and move it without resistance. I always try and grab my horse's tail as I walk behind him to get him used to me messing with his tail. That way if

someone ever grabs his tail or if his tail ever gets caught on something, he will be use to having it messed with. I then advance to pulling and popping his tail. By holding the tail with both hands, I lean back and down pulling the tail. The horse will naturally pull forward at first. Start slow and move to longer pulls. Soon the horse will stand and let you pull his tail, which will pop and release tension in his lower back/tailbone area. If you try this without proper preparation you will likely see the bottom of your horse's rear hoof, so do it right. "If you take the time it takes, it takes less time".

Sacking out is about getting your

horse to let you do anything without showing you resistance. Having your horse walk backwards when you pull his tail shows the horse understands to give to pressure. Gently holding your horse's ear and he should follow you. This is not pulling your horse by the ear. Other things to sack out and teach lightness is tie a rope on your horse's foot, using [hobbles](#) does this same thing, lead him with that rope, then tie it around his girth area and lead him that way and then tie it to his rear hoof and lead him that way. All of this helps your horse to understand how to give to pressure and not fight or pull from it.

Sacking out is not shoving things in the face of a horse. It is not putting cones, bags and other scary objects in his stall thinking that will help him. Sacking out is not about scaring a

horse, it is to teach the horse that it is OK to get scared, but not to run and react when scared. It teaches a horse to look to you when scared and to listen to you when scared. Sacking out makes you and your horse grow in trust and confidence. I can't say this enough. The concept of sacking out, preparing your horse, establishing leadership, being able to create fear and remove fear, teaching a horse to deal with fear in a different way than running or reacting is the most important thing you can do. It forces you to grow, it forces you to learn, it forces you to understand, it prepares you to read your horse and it teaches you to respond to your horse's fear with confidence and leadership. Then you get the big picture and you grow in your horsemanship.

Watch a sacking out video on how to be under your horse: [Click Here](#)

Hobble training is an advanced form of sacking out and will do a lot to improve your horse's confidence in you. See my [Hobble Page](#).

### **The Number One Question I Get Asked:**

My horse is perfect but..... I love my horse but.... My horse does not.... I can't get my horse to.... Why does my horse.... I have owned horses my entire life, but this horse.... I rode horses as a kid but now..... I don't know my horse's past but....

All of these questions are the SAME problem. No one will admit it, no one will agree with it, but it all comes down to the same answer: **"You don't understand horses"**

A lot of horses owners are women and a lot are older (sorry more mature) women. Not sure if this is a child hood dream, a search for something later in life, an ability, financially and time, to get back into horses or a way to live through their kids, whatever the reason, it does not matter. It does not change a thing. Just as when a horse has a "so-called" problem, it does not matter why, what his breed, what his past is, since 99% of the time it comes down to the person. The horse is not the problem, yet it continues to amaze me how no matter what happens, people will find a way to make it the horse's fault or some other fault and never their own fault. It just ain't so!

Until people look to them self for the answers, they will always be blaming the horse or



making excuses. Horses are stuck in their life, they have no choice, they are stuck with people that love them, yet hurt them, they are stuck with people that feed them and care for them and yet hurt them and blame them. All answers come from YOU. Horses are perfect in most every way, until Humans get involved.

People change over the years, most are probably a lot more concerned about getting hurt, most are more careful, most are more aware how a horse can hurt them, all of this a horse knows. It is their job to know, it is their nature to pay attention, it is how they stay alive, those who do not pay attention are killed and do not live long.

Too many people think being patient and loving is more important than any other aspect of horse training. Patience without assertiveness, direction, discipline or correction, just tells a horse you are weak and not a good leader. It tells the horse that you do not understand horses, you do not know how they think and therefore do not connect with them. If you really understood horses, you would know that just being patient is just as bad as just being mean. Both just confuse the horse and are inconsistent to the horse. Both teach the horse bad lessons.

A horse needs to know that you are in charge, you are a leader, you can make him move his feet and that you allow him to be with you. Horses do not care if you love them, feed them, give them treats or mean well. They care about if you are head horse, if you are a strong leader, if you make the rules clear and they know what they can and can't do.

You will never see a wild horse begging other horses to follow him, lead horses do not give treats to try and get other horses to like them, horses that want to be everyone's friend are always at the bottom of the pecking order, yet far too many humans do this and wonder why it does not work. A good lead horse will be strong, will give direction and correction, it will not beg, it will tell you and then enforce what it told you, if you do not respond, it will always show others that it is in charge and if you forget it, the horse will kick you or bite you to remind you. It may sound mean, rough and tough, but it is how horses survive, it is how they feel safe, it is what they look for and need, it is the only thing they respect. Yet you will see people always trying to be friends, trying to love, trying to treat a horse like a dog or child and it just does not work.

Would you try and pet or give a treat to a rattlesnake to let him know you love him and hope he would not bite you? Then why do people try and love a horse and hope they will not kick them or disrespect them, it is the same thing. A horse wants a strong leader, he has to know that you can make him do what you ask or he will ignore you and treat you like a lower horse and expect you to do what he tells you. And when you don't do what he tells you (either because you did not understand him or ignored him) he will bite or kick you, just like he would do to any other lower horse. This is not mean, it is not aggressive, it is not strange or odd, it is normal horse behavior. And if you understood horses, you would know it.

Watch my videos, I love my horses, I kiss my horses, I give treats from my mouth, but I know that if I don't discipline my horses, if I don't correct them when they challenge me or show me disrespect or treat me like a lower horse, they will not like me and will not listen to me and will eventually hurt me. You can not have love and friendship with a horse, unless you make the horse know you are the boss, you are the high horse, you are at the top of the pecking order and he has to listen.... it is the way of the horse and until you get that, you will never have what you are looking for.

I tell people all the time, unless your horse respects you, you endanger your horse. You cannot help keep your horse safe unless you can control him, unless he listens to you in any situation.....but time and time again, I see people wanting to be nice, wanting to try and be friends with their horse and then wonder why the horse ran off and got hurt or killed. It really irritates me to see people talk about abuse or meanness about those who correct and control their horses, and then they feel good because they do not correct or control their horse and then say they are being loving, nice and caring. "Horse Pucky"

The people being only nice are the mean ones, they are the one that hurt their horses, they are the ones that make their horses live in constant confusion and make their horses feel insecure and unsafe since they do not have a strong and clear leader. These horses are always acting out, pulling, being spooky, being nervous, not feeling secure, always looking for a leader, always challenging you, always trying to find their place and figure out if they need to be in charge if they someone else is in charge and this is not good for the horse. So those

that do not understand horses, think they are being kind and helping the horse, in fact they are doing the opposite, but will not believe this, even if they see it.

You cannot help those who do not want to be helped, since they think they are right. With that mindset, they are not willing to learn something new and in the end, the horse pays.

Knowledge of the horse is the best gift you can give to a horse.

### **Trailer Problems and Issues:**

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**NEVER USE, a whip, a stud chain, multiple people, multiple ropes, force, fear or pain to load a horse.** You will only teach the horse to fear the trailer more and confirm that the trailer brings pain, fear and force. Too many people only load their horse before they leave for a trip. This teaches the horse all the bad things about the trailer. It is the same thing as if a person only catches or visits a horse when they saddle up and ride, the horse learns not be caught.

How many horse people can say they have ridden in a horse trailer as a horse. Not very many. I can tell you, it is loud, unstable, rough, dusty, and not pleasurable. I know this because I wanted to see how my horse felt. A trailer is scary, closed area, with no way out and makes a horse feel insecure. A horse is a flight animal and Mother Nature programmed them to run when in danger, to stay in open areas to easily see danger and to not get in small confined areas where a predator can trap them.

I am not a big fan of using food for trailer problems even thou it may help, it is not my first choice. Trailer loading is about trust and respect the horse has for the person putting them in it. I have my doubts about any trainer that can't get a horse to load. I have loader horses that have broken halters, kicked and have been in trailer wrecks. So I know that loading is about understanding the horse.

I was told a story about a "trainer" that came to get a horse and could not get it to load. So he left the trailer and when another horse went in the trailer, the other horse (first time loader) went in with the first horse. Guess what happened? The door was slammed shut and the horse was trapped. So the trainer had to come back for his trailer, no telling how long this took. Anyway the "trainer" went to let one horse out and ended up letting both horses out. Thinking like a horse, how do you think the never been in a trailer horse felt about his first trailer experience.



I don't see a lot of patience from a trainer that first of all, can't load a horse and secondly, once a horse is loaded he can't get one horse out without letting the other horse out. This guy may be a great trainer, but I believe in good horsemanship. Any good horseman understands a horse and can work around most horse issues. The problems with a lot of trainers is they train the horse for them and not for the owner. If I help someone with a problem, I don't just work on the horse. If I do that, then only I can handle the horse and the owner will still have problems. I will only work on horses if the owner is willing to get involved and learn the horse and understand the horse. That way they will be able to fix problems and become a better horse person, which helps the horse in the best way. I see a lot of people say that guy has a good horse, he must be a good trainer. Because a horse is good for someone does not make that horse a good horse. He may be scared, he me so controlled that he cannot react or he may be drugged or in pain from large bits or spurs. OK off my soap box on trainers and back to trailer issues.

You don't absolutely need a trailer to teach this horse to load, but it would be better and is a bit easier. So if you can get a trailer at you place, that would be best. If you can get one put it near your horse, in the horse's pasture or at the gate, the more the horse has to walk by it, see it, and is exposed to it, the better. Soon it will see it as part of her safe environment and will ignore it. Then you need to lead and walk the horse by the trailer, tie her to it to groom her, give her grain or treats by it, make it a safe and nice place to be. Once the horse feels safe by it, then you can start working on getting her inside. Don't let the horse know your goal is to get her inside. The horse needs to figure out that when I am inside the trailer, I am left alone, I am safe and it is not a bad place to be.

If you don't have a trailer, you can use a garage, a small area, make a covered area with a

sheet or tarp, or find some place that resembles a small enclosed area that is spooky or scary to your horse.

You have to be able to handle your horse well before you start. Work on moving your horse in and out of gates, doors and confined areas. Back her in gates, around corners that she can



not see, etc. She has to know a walk command and a go signal. When you move a horse's feet, you build trust and gain respect. Most horses won't load because it does not trust and respect you enough to give up its safety for you. I like my horses to load without halter or ropes and just by me pointing to trailer and telling them to load. That is the way all horses should be able to load. However, this takes time, trust and understanding of the horse. You can get your horse to load this way in about two hours. I know what you are thinking. I have heard it a 100 times. Not my horse, you don't know this horse, my horse is stubborn, my horse is too smart, etc. Trust me on this, you can load your horse as easy as walking it into pasture, if you do it right, within a couple of hours.

First, don't force it, don't trap it, don't scare it, don't hit it, don't cause it pain and don't shut the door as soon as it goes in. Most people do all of these things trying to load a horse. Why, because they think like a person (predator) and not like a horse (prey).

Once you work on getting your horse to walk when you tell her and to go where you tell her, she will walk in the trailer. Many people rush this step and make this a lot harder than it is. When you try and get her in the trailer, don't let her walk in. If you try to get her in the trailer she will not want to do it. Just let her explore and check out the trailer without entering. Walk her up to it and then walk her away, walk her up to it, stand with her and let her relax and then walk her away from. Don't just concentrate on the door or she will pick up that you just want her to get in. Work on the whole trailer. You don't want her to know or think you are trying to get her in the trailer, it has to be her idea.

The more you walk up to trailer and then walk away the easier it will be. If she attempts to get in the trailer, only let her put one or two feet in and then calmly back her out and walk away. Pretty soon she will be thinking why can't I walk in the trailer and she will want to walk in. Bring her back, you walk to the end of the lead rope with you in trailer and her out (don't pull her or call her) just stand there or sit there. If she steps in, fine let her and just relax. don't you react or get excited or happy, just act like any other time she walked up to you. The less of a big deal you make it, the less of a big deal it will be.

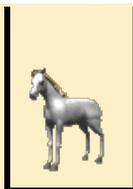
Another tip is open all doors and windows, let as much light in as you can, secure doors with hay string or strap so the wind will not blow or move them. Once she goes in on her own, give her a little carrot (this is my touch, not required). Next time, maybe scratch her favorite spot, give her treat and walk away. If you are in a closed and safe area, after she enters on her own (not by you pulling or pushing her!!!) take her halter off and walk away. Let her think she is not going to be trapped or cornered as soon as she gets tricked in. don't close the door for the first five or six times she enters. Then close it slowly, don't leave her alone, give her a treat or some grain and then let her out. The more you can get her to associate the trailer with calm, treats, grooming, relaxing, the better she will be at loading. Too many people teach their horse to associate the trailer with fear, whips, being hit, being dragged, stud chains, force and fear. Then blame the horse for not wanting to load.

People make a much bigger deal about trailering than it ever needs to be. You just have to understand the horse's point of view, think like a horse, and put yourself in their horse shoes. Loading is about trust and respect, if you have good ground control skills and making sure the horse knows you are a good leader he can trust and not fear.

### **Problems with Rearing, Kicking & Biting:**



Here are some suggestions on handling some issues with horses that have been taught bad behaviors by unknowing horse handlers.



Try and never let go of a horse when it rears or they will learn that to get free they just have to rear. Horses rear for various reasons, to show aggression, to look bigger, to try to scare off predators, to show dominance, if they feel trapped, if they don't want to do something and to get their handler to let go of them. Under saddle, a horse will rear if the bit is too tight, if the bit is hurting them and they think they have tried everything to stop the pain, so they try rearing. Some time when you back a horse too aggressively, too early, it will rear trying to escape the pain of the bit. Usually the rear is due to pain, fear, or because they do not want to do something. They will only try this a couple of times and if it does not work they will usually quit. Some time, by accident, a horse will flip over. However, if they get release when they do this, they will continue to flip over since that is how they got release. In your horse's mind, he reared and you let go, so he thinks rearing is the right answer to getting free, not good. I know if it is between you getting hurt and letting go, then you have to let go, but it is better not to get into that situation.



Now to stop a rearing horse you have to be prepared, very alert and quick. Since this is a very



dangerous behavior, I would suggest you let a professional fix this, but sometime you may find yourself on a rearing horse and may need some idea on what to do. If you are on the ground, have a lead rope long enough so if the horse rears it will not pull the rope from your hands. Some people put a knot at the end of their rope so it will not slide all the way through their hands. When the horse rears, move to his side, towards the butt and pull his head to the side. Do not try to pull him down and stop his rear, you can't and you will only show him you can't. By moving to his butt and pulling him to the side, you take away his power and move to a safer position, which is not under

his front feet. In the picture to the right, the person on the ground should be bending the horses head and moving the butt to take away from the horses upward movement. This is a good example on why to make sure if you get on a horse and allow a person to control the horse on the ground, you better know he knows what he is doing. The guy on the ground is not going to get hurt, the rider is.

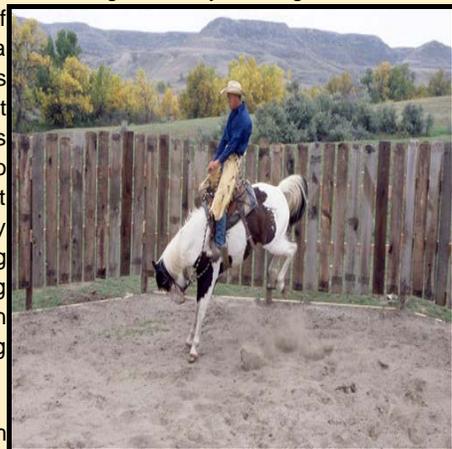


After you pull him to the side try to attack his butt so he will disengage and spin away from you and back away. This will cause him to face you. He may try it again, do the same thing, if you can get him to back up or spin he should stop. If you make him spin before he rears, then he will not rear. This is tricky and a little advanced move so you may want to get someone who has done it before. A horse will not

normally rear for no reason. For that matter, a horse will not normally do anything for no reason. If horse is rearing while you walk, then the horse is having a problem with where she is, what she sees or where she is going. All horses paw or move their front legs when they rear, so this may not mean the horse is being aggressive, they are just trying to keep their balance or appear bigger. Horses don't normally jump on someone when they rear unless they feel cornered and threatened. A horse does not want to lose footing and jumping on you is not a stable ground, they will usually avoid this if they can. Unless they see you as a predator then they may try and strike you. A strike is very different than landing you.



Another more advanced move for a rearing horse is to attack his feet. I would pop a horse with the lead rope on the front feet and chest area and charge him. By moving his feet, I win. He would try to back up fast. He can't rear well if he is backing. Having him do circles may stop for a little while, but you need to make rearing as uncomfortable as possible, he has to think that rearing is more trouble than it is worth and it gets him nothing in return but grief. In the picture to right notice the reins are loose and the rider is just riding out the bucks and not using one rein to try and stop the bucks. The rider could be just letting the horse figure it out or was caught not paying attention. I would be flex the horse with ONE rein and getting his mind off bucking back to paying attention to me.



If you circle a horse as punishment, don't circle him as if you are taking a walk looking for clovers;



attack his butt and get aggressive at his rear to move his butt and then back him aggressively like he has just tried to kill you. Rearing, kicking, and biting are the only time I think you can be aggressive to a horse. They have to learn fast that these are not options when dealing with people. Remember if you back a horse, you have to make sure they can move backwards, not into a wall or corner or they will feel trapped and rear again and that will make problem worse. It would be better if you never had to do any of this and you could tell when a horse was thinking about rearing or getting into a rearing situation and then make them do something else before they ever reared. Basically redirect their attention to something other than rearing. As seen in the picture to the left, some

time rearing can be helpful.

If the horse is rearing up when saddled, it has not had a proper foundation for taking a saddle. This could explain future bucking or kicking as well. Other things that could cause these



behaviors; it could be a new trainer, a new location, the saddle may be hurting the horse or the horse just does not want to be ridden. Be careful not to correct the horse with the saddle in hand or the horse will start thinking the saddle is causing him to be punished. When you correct a horse for dangerous behavior, you have to get aggressive and act as if the horse just tired to kill you. The more you scare the horse and freak it out, the less likely they will do it again. This is assuming that you know the horse is not acting out of fear or pain. Do corrections fast and move on, don't keep going after the horse and attacking them. Corrections should not last any longer than the bad behavior. In the picture to the left, this buck is intentionally being caused by the rope about the rear girth. I think this is Chris Cox and he is making the horse tired of bucking and showing the horse that bucking is hard work. This will make the horse buck less once he gets on him. Not a good training method for a horse, but appears to work

on horses that are confirmed buckers and have learned to get rid of riders.

As for kicking, a horse can't kick to well if it is doing circles, backing or moving. The best way to ensure you aren't kicked is to always keep a quarter of an inch between you and the horses hoof. (An old cowboy saying) If a horse is kicking at you, he does not respect you and thinks you are lower in pecking order than he is. Make the horse move his feet and you win. If you are holding a horse and they try to kick, pull their head right to their butt. If a horse wants to kick when they are facing you, let them get some exercise and keep her head facing you or try to make them back up, they will get tired and won't kick for long. If you just move out of the way when a horse kicks at you, you moved first, he won and now you have told him that he is in charge and to get you to move he just has to kick at you. If a horse kicks when you touch her tail or back legs, you can try some desensitizing things on her tail, butt and back legs. You can do this with a rope or long soft stick or pole. Rub these on her neck, back, front legs and then work your way back to tail, butt, and rear legs. She has to learn that when she is touched back there she will not be hurt. Never stand directly behind the horse when doing this. People find out fast that if a horse kicks a stick or pole, it will stab you like an arrow if you right behind the horse.



Sometime desensitizing works good when the horse is eating grain or being fed. They are more focused on food and are not so sensitive to what you are doing. It also lets them know that you are

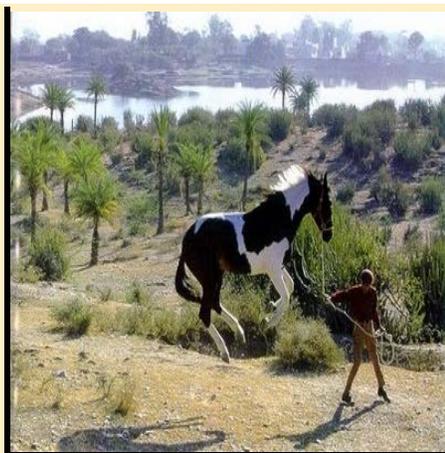


not after their food and they should not get protective of it. This also makes sure your horse knows that you are above her in the pecking order and she should not try to push away from food. Your goal is stop before the horse gets to the point where she kicks. You need to get good at advance and retreat (Pressure and Release). Move towards her butt slowly and before she reacts, at the first sign of stress, retreat slowly and let her relax. Each time you do this get closer and closer to the problem area. Timing is important here, if you stop after she starts to react, she will think you stopped because of what she did.

Horses need to trust you. Let's face it, we have jobs, kids and other responsibilities. We only have so much time to spend with our horses. However, too many people try to fix problems with their horse all the time they are with them. Not good. Spend some time with your horse not doing anything. don't teach your horse that every time he is with you he is getting pulled, pushed and corrected. Remember anytime you are with your horse, you are teaching him. Just being with him you are teaching him to trust you, not to fear you and other things. I know kicking is dangerous and unacceptable but you have to be careful that this is not being done from fear or pain, if it is, you should not correct a horse for getting scared. If you are sure that this is a respect issue, then you can discipline the horse. A horse has to know that it is unacceptable to put his butt to you. You can walk to the butt, touch it, mess with him, but he cannot move his butt to you for a scratch or as a threat. Stopping this is usually pretty easy if done right and with consistency.

Some people use a whip, some use a poke with a pointed object and some old cowboys used a BB gun. I don't suggest any of these but they do work. A cattle prod would work too, but I would not use it either. If what you do scares the horse so bad that he forgets to use his left-brain and think, then you have taught him to be scared. The idea is the make sure the horse understands that if he puts his butt to you, there is negative response that he dose not like and does not want. I use a lead rope and it should only take one or two times. If a horse is taught to keep his butt away from you, he will not try to kick you.

If any of these problems happen in a stall, fix these



problems outside the stall. Do it in a field, round pen or away from barn and stall. Make sure your horse knows the signal to move their butt away from you. I start with a click and point to the butt, at the same time I pull (lightly/suggest) the head to me and towards the butt. This makes the butt move away from me and makes his head come to me. After you do this a few times and the horse becomes comfortable, he may need some extra encouragement to move a little faster or he may stall on you and test you. So next time you point and click and he dose not move fast enough, pop him with the end of lead rope in the butt. When I say pop, swing the rope overhand and come down right on the hip next to you. Don't be shy when disciplining him and know it should sting. The harder you do this, the less likely you will have to do it again. Be ready this will startle him and he may try to run or pull away, be ready and pull his head to you as you head towards the butt, and he will face you, and his butt will rapidly move away from you. Now the next time you move to his butt he will move it away from, that is good, but don't forget to point and click, and stop so you reward him when he moves. Don't keep chasing his butt and make him circle or run from you. He should almost be scared for you to approach his butt. You can desensitize him later after the kicking problem is fixed. Do this on both sides. After you are sure he knows this well, you should be able to move his butt away from you by a click and point, or better yet, he will not wait for click and point and will not let you approach his butt and will immediately face you when you approach his butt. Your body language will tell him if you want him to move or if you want to touch his tail.

As for **bucking**, if a horse bucks when I canter, I canter faster and longer. Then I stop the horse and canter again until the horse starts to canter three times without bucking, then we move on. This is assuming I do not get thrown. As with a lot of training, if I know he is going to buck, I can be ready and redirect his attention onto something he knows.

Biting can be caused by different things, some in our control and some not in our control. I have a 3 yr old that will nuzzle and search me like a cop, checking every pocket to see if I have snacks. Everyone who sees this tells me that this is a bad habit he will bite me some day. He may, but I allow it as long as he does not use his teeth. If he does, I correct him fast and move on. Some time weaning a horse early will cause them to get mouthy. If a horse is given treats by people he may accidentally bite someone who shoves their fingers in his mouth. Not the horse's fault, I get nipped sometime not paying attention or giving a treat incorrectly. This is my fault and I don't punish or correct the horse for that. However, if I have a carrot in my hand and my horse tries to take it, he gets a pop on the nose. He then walks next to me staring at the carrot, but knows not to try and take it until I give it to him. Every mistake by a horse is a training opportunity.

Chewing could also be a sign of teeth discomfort. A horse, especially a young one may be trying out his new teeth. If a horse is biting you and has biting issues, you can do the following. If you give him treats by hand, stop. If you carry treats in your pockets, stop. If you give him treats, only do it by putting them in a bowl or feeder and never by hand. After you stop this habit, you can go back to giving him treats by hand.

Give a horse a feed bowl, bucket, rubber ball, traffic cone or some other rubber that he will chew and play with. This may relieve any teeth issues and by chewing on the rubber things it may massage or soothe his gums or teeth.

This is another option, but it has to be consistent, immediate, and not personal. Every time he puts his lips on you or your clothes, blade strike or elbow him. The smaller the movement of you arm and hands the better. You don't want to make a big deal out of this and you don't want to miss and then start chasing him to correct him. The harder and faster you do it the better. I always tell people when you try to be too nice and correct too softly, you make the problem worse and the horse learns to play you and test you. You actually start desensitizing him to your movement and correction.

When I say blade strike him, do this by making a 90-degree angle with your arm, like signaling to make a right turn with you left hand. This creates a blade or barrier between you and the horse's head. By popping, striking or tapping him, what ever you prefer to call it, you startle him, you cause a little pain and discomfort and both of those things will make him not want that to happen. He should not know he is about to be corrected. Don't slap or hit in or near the eye, if you can catch him right on the bridge of the nose, the lips, or his front jaw line. All of these areas have no muscle and skin is close to the bone. Your elbow, your palm or bottom of your fist will make a nice impact on him. Your arm or hand should not move more that a few inches, so you won't have too much power and your movement will be small and fast, and once it is over, be done and move on. Don't get mad or upset and don't take it personal or correct him three times for one bite.

Your goal is for the horse to quickly associate his lips on you gets him a quick pop from you. You will not hurt the little guy and you will not be doing anymore that another horse would do to him. The only time I would tell someone to hit the horse in the face area is if he is a biter or aggressive. I would not do this unless the other options did not work. Some may tell you to back him up, move his feet and circle him every time he does this. This may work but timing is much more important and if you don't do it just right, the horse will not learn to associate it with the negative action he is doing. The elbow or forearm pop is immediate and there will be no confusion, if you do it consistently, the elbow happens when he put his lips on you. If done right, this will only take about three or four times and then he will stop. He may test you again later and if he gets popped again, he will wait longer to test and so on. Many bucks are caused by loss of balance of the rider. When you get off balance, you lean and put more pressure on one stirrup or on one side of the saddle, this confuses the horse and sometimes spooks them and puts them in a fear buck. Staying balance and out of the horse's way will keep the calm and not cause fear.

You have to be very alert and watch your horse so you know when he is going to try and nip you. Horses know what is going to happen before it happens. Why, because they are always on alert and very sensitive to their surroundings, which is how they stay alive in the wild. If you telegraph your move, he will not try to nip you and he will wait until you are not ready and then try to put his lips on you. Horses are professional people trainers and I watch them train people all the time. Be consistent and help the little guy be a better horse. Not too many people like horses as much as I do and if I have to get a little tough with one to save him, make him safer, or help make him a better horse, I will and it won't be personal.

Remember, he is not thinking he is doing anything wrong and in his mind, it is not wrong. He is being a horse. If he were in a herd, he would do the same thing. The only difference is another horse would bite him hard, kick him or head butt him and he would learn much faster and may get hurt in the process.

If a horse kicks or bucks while you are leading you need to correct this immediately. You are correcting a negative behavior when you are holding her, if he kicked a wall you should correct it, if he started bucking you would correct it, any behavior that is dangerous or unwanted you have to show him that he cannot do that when with you. Any correction for unwanted behavior is the same. A horse does something, you have to show him it is unwanted and unacceptable, you do this with timing, either right before it happens, while it is happening or immediately after it happens. You correct a horse by making the horse feel uncomfortable, back them aggressively, whack the butt and make them spin it away from you, lunging him fast, taking his head away, kicking him (be careful with kicking), raising your hands and attacking him, scaring the crap out of him, so he associates the act with the negative feeling. You never want to get in a fight with a horse, you want to impress the horse that you can make him move, you can prevent him from running away and the only release is to face you in submission. As long as you let him move his feet he will not feel the need to fight, that is why stud chains are counter productive, they cause pain and prevent a horse from moving, so the horse only has one option if it can't move it's feet, the only option is to fight. Chasing a horse keeps the feet moving and shows the horse that you control him, so you are higher and you are the leader.

**[Click Here to View a video on horses and kicking:](#)**

When doing research for this page I ran across an article about understanding horses and horse vision. And the picture below was the picture they used in the article. So I see this picture and read about "understanding horse". So I think what the hell, how can anyone talk about understanding a horse and use the picture below. Ahwww, look at the pretty horse, he is so cute, look at his pretty groomed forelocks, look how shinny and clean the horse is, look

how his eye whiskers have been so neatly trimmed, look at the pretty clean matching leather halter, AND LOOK AT THE BIG STUPID STUD CHAIN ON THE HORSES FACE AND CHIN. This is typical horse crap that is being put out there to confuse people about loving their horse. Chains and horses do not go together, period, end of story. Anyone using a chain on a horse face has no business talking about understanding a horse.



[Move to top of page ↑](#)

### Dealing with Saddle Problems and Saddle Issues:



When a horse has a bad experience with a saddle, it becomes a big mean thing to the horse. No big deal. Always make sure it is not physical problems with the saddle, like dental issues with bit, saddle fit, soreness from injury or dirty cinch. If you have a stall or small pen, put the little guy in there and give him some grain or hay. While he is eating, bring in a saddle and set



in the opposite end of stall. Leave it and the horse. If you have, two or three saddles bring them all in one at a time and put them in different areas of stall. Let them work out their issues for a few hours. Bring the guy some carrots and feed him close or near the saddles. Then once he is good with that, lay some carrots on the saddle and let him eat them off the saddle. A few days of this, he will think the saddle is the carrot fairy. Then progress to holding a saddle and bring him a carrot. Before you try to put that saddle on him, make sure he loves the saddle and shows no reaction to. Bring it with you to groom him, to feed him, just make part of you and he soon will trust it like he trust you. Once you saddle him, make it short, put it on and take it off. Don't let go of it. Slowly increase the time it stays on him. You may only get to 10 sec on first day. After he lets you put saddle on back, give him a carrot and take it off. After this, the cinch will be another matter. You have to desensitize his cinch area as well. Do this with a soft rope. Put it around him and slide it around. Make it snug and pull it off. Make sure he can handle a rope you are hold around his cinch area without a reaction. There is a very good saying in the horse world. If you take the time it takes, it takes less time. Don't rush this. As far as he is concerned that stinking saddle tried to eat him, hurt him, and beat him, the saddle is not his friend. You need to change that.

The first time you get him saddled, don't untie him. Just saddle him, brush him give him a treat, pick his feet and then unsaddle him. You have to give him a few good experiences with the saddle to push that bad one behind. After a few good saddles while he is tied, then untie and take him for a short walk, let him graze a little, bring him back, and unsaddle. Then after a few of those, take him to the round pen and work him lightly while saddled, make it short and non stressful. Then unsaddle him. After this, you will be on your way. For the saddle, I would start now with blankets, remember earlier about touching her everywhere, after you have her trust, a blanket will be no different that a rope, a stick, feed bag etc. I would not saddle before two. Then only for a short period. When you



are sacking her out, lean on her, let her support your weight, later you get her used to you sitting on her, sliding on and off her, etc As for the bit and saddle intro, I never use a bit. If I get a problem horse the first thing I do is get rid of the bit. A good horse will work and ride in a halter. I use a bosal (also called a hackamore), this fits around the nose and is much less harsh then metal in the mouth. A bit, if you decide to use it, should only be introduced later in training. Any good trainer will start a horse in a halter and rope. My first rides on young horses are always with a rope halter and rope. The fastest way to ruin a horse is to put a bit in and start pulling on both reins. By starting with a halter and rope you teach the horse to give to pressure and since you have been leading her around, she understands it, trust it and knows it will not hurt her. Here is a good video about the negative affects of a bit.

### **:Negative Affects of Bits**

Not familiar with the term playing up and on right rein? I think you are talking about her right and left lead. Most horses have a good side and an off side. If you are using or have access to a round pen you can try and fix it there. Horses that know and change leads on their own will normally do it under saddle (when you are riding). Throwing her head could be a sign of resistance or display that she does not know how to change leads. A horse running off lead is also called cross firing, it is not smooth and is rough on horse and rider. By round penning and change directions you will learn to pick up her left lead. By making her do small turns either on line or in a round pen, she will learn that picking up the correct lead is easier.

Head throwing can be a sign of pain too, make sure the bit is not too tight or hurting her. Most horses can be ridden with a halter in a round pen. They can't go far and will learn not to run through the halter when they get tired. I would put a halter on horse, round pen it, teach to give to halter. Have it change directions at a canter so it can learn to change leads. Then get on horse in round pen and ride it with a halter, if it cross fires, pick up speed and try and push the rear to the outside to help her pick up correct lead.

The horse does not have the problem, he is being a horse. Either you or some other person has caused this behavior, not the horse. You are right about you and your horse are supposed to be partners. But a partnership is a two way street. Your horse is not being a good partner if he is doing this out of disrespect. I think you like most people have taught this without knowing it. Not sure how long you have had horse, but you said he started this lately, so I assume there was a time before lately where he did not do this. My guess is when you ride him, as soon as you get back to barn you get off the horse, you take the saddle off, you brush him, you may give him a treat or some grain and then you put him up with his buddies. Any or all of these are why he is doing this. Think like a horse. He has been trained that as soon as I get back to barn good things happen, so I need to get back to barn faster so good things will start happening. Now that is probably part of the problem, the other part is you are allowing him to do. A horse cannot back up very fast compared to how fast he can run, when he starts to go faster than a walk, turn him and face the other way where is butt is to the barn. If he is still in a hurry, great, work on his back up, let him go as fast as he wants in reverse. This is one thing. Another is to let him run (which it seems like you have done already) and as soon as he gets to barn, start working him, do some turns, back him up, and then start walking away from barn like you are going on another ride, make him walk out and then make him walk back in. You will have to plan to get back to barn early so you will have time to work him. Once he starts thinking, man when I get back to barn I have to work, she is going to back me, ride me in circles, work on opening gates, and other things, he will not be so much in such a hurry to get back to the barn. Letting him run back to barn is not a good idea, but if it happens, then make him walk and walk back in.

strong>[Click Here to View a video by Rick Gore about saddling:](#)<

View a video about preparing a horse to accept a rider: [Click Here](#)

Don't get off him right away at barn, sit on him, talk to friends, work on sacking him out, walk under trees, ride the fence line and check for weak or dangerous fence hazards, he has to start thinking that the barn is NOT where, you get off, my saddle comes off, I get grain, etc. this will take his drive to want to get back to barn. Another thing you can do when he gets in a hurry to run back to barn, turn him around and run him away from barn. Then start walking

back to barn, if he breaks out of walk, turn and run him away again, soon he will be too tired to run and will want to walk. All of these fixes depend on you. You have to be consistent and make sure you don't get mean or mad. I laugh when my horse does this sometime and then we work on things like backing, turning, going up and down ditches, left turns, right turns, flexing, stopping and just standing, this is a training opportunity for you and your horse. Your horse is helping you be a better horse person and he is challenging you to out think him. Show him you can. Make the right thing easy and wrong thing difficult.

### **Advance and Retreat AKA: Pressure and Release:**



You can build a horse's confidence by doing this training, using pressure and release. When you use advance (pressure) and retreat (release of pressure) you let the horse learn that you will stop and will give the horse some relief if he does not react (face you or stop moving away). Of course timing and feel come into play if you are off on either it will confuse the horse and not teach what you are trying to teach. You create a draw, curiosity, and the horse will follow you and know it can push you or get you move away, that tells a horse you are lower, you are not a threat, you are not a predator trying to eat or catch him, it tells a horse you knows horses and can talk in their language. Horses learn when you stop doing something to them (Release pressure). Therefore, if you stop when they are running, rearing, kicking, or some other bad behavior, you teach them to do that and you will quit, give them release, what they were doing must be the right answer, even if you think it is the wrong answer, you tell a horse it is right when you stop pressure. Your goal is to stop or retreat (release) when a horse is doing what you want them to do. If you try to reach out to them, talk to them, move toward them and keep causing them to move away and they prevent you from touching them, they learn to move away from you for relief (release of pressure). You will be teaching them, to get release, they need to move away from you. The more you try to get close to them, and push them, and put pressure with NO release, the more they will see you as a predator and know you do not understand horse talk. If you go out to round pen and stand in the middle of pen, a horse will stay next to fence since that is as far as he can get from you. If you face him or walk to him, he will move away from you in order to stay as far as possible. You can use this to teach him if you do it right and slow.

Try this with a horse you can't touch. Stand in the middle of pen, watch him move, and try to stay facing him without moving towards him, so you just slowly and calmly spin in the same spot and watch the horse move or run around the pen. Now when the horse is opposite side of the gate, while you still face him, walk backwards to gate and watch what happens. The horse will stop and move to opposite side of gate to be as far from you as possible. Don't back all the way to gate, just back half way and stop, always facing the horse "facing a horse is pressure", they see this as predatory behavior, aggression or challenge. As soon as the horse stops and looks at you, turn away smoothly (don't face him) and walk (away) to gate and relax. You just taught the horse to face you and stop moving and You will walk away (give him release). The horse will learn that if he looks at you (shows respect) you will move away (give release), since a horse always looks for comfort and release, it will learn how to find that by looking/facing you. Wait a few minutes, now go back to center of pen and he will move again, do it again, after a few times, he will get it and will face you faster and stop running and will start facing you to get release (to make you look or walk away). Any time he stops running and faces you, turn your back and walk away, so it is clear that is the right answer.

Now you will be speaking horse and he will start relaxing with you, since he knows you will give him release and not keep chasing him. You can also do this with food. Once the horse starts approaching you, set the food down and walk away, he will learn this fast. Now you have to remember to advance and retreat. At first they may sniff you, don't reach out and touch them, let them sniff you, let them stop, and then eat. If you try to touch them (apply pressure) they will retreat and not sniff you for fear of you will try to touch them. Retreat (release) is the key and soon they will let you touch them for one second, then two and so on. It will take a while, but slow is better.

"If what a horse is doing gets you to quit (release or stop pressure), then that is what he will learn to do and this it is the right answer." That is the thing about horse training that most people miss. None of this happens immediately, it takes time. And if you the take the time it

takes, it takes less time. **Horse training is a process - not an event.**



This is a good site for explaining Advance and Retreat: [\(Click Here\)](#)

### **General Safety Around Horses:**



It is very easy to get hurt when around or dealing with a horse. They get spooked, they move fast without thinking, they weigh over 1000 pounds and if you are in their way, you will get hurt. With a young scared horse, they will react more severely and with much less reason or forethought. Something like 70% of all new horse owners get out of horses in the first year from getting hurt, so be careful. Daily grooming is a way to inspect your horse. It also helps you bond with your horse. This also identifies training deficiencies. If your horse is trying to kick when you groom a certain area, she may do this because she is sore. Watch a horse's



ears and touch around the same area to see if you can get a reaction, to identify the problem. When leading a horse never wrap the rope around your hand in such a manner that if a horse pulls and runs off, the rope will trap your hand or you will be dragged. Always carry the rope so it will feed out freely and you can drop it in an emergency. Never let the rope hang so low that the horse could step on it or over it. If a horse gets a rope under his leg, and he has not been sacked out properly, he will spook, rear, run and panic.

You are responsible not to let your horse get into trouble. Which means you have to be on the look out for possible dangers to your horse? By being alert, you can see when the horse starts feeling insecure. Their head will go up high, ears perked forward, they will stop moving, snort, and move their head up and down (trying to focus their eyes on something). All of these things are clues that danger, or a reaction, is about to occur.

Always be aware of things going on around you when you around horses. You can get hurt by another horse as well. Be on the look out for plastic bags, blowing traps, loose horses, cars or anything that can possibly spook your horse or another horse. If ever in a fenced in area with a loose or runaway horse, don't stand by a fence or wall. This is a common mistake made by many. A scared runaway horse will run next to the fence or wall, if you are there, you will be trampled. By moving the middle of the fenced area, you give yourself room to move and the horse is less likely to run at you in the middle, since he can see you.

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January 16, 2008

### **Accidents While Horseback Riding Are Causing Thousands of Injuries and Deaths Each Year**

I'm guessing that if you've been around horses much at all, you've been bit, stepped on, kicked, bucked, reared, etc. Most of us have experienced at least some of this. One gal down the road from us has had her arm broken twice in 8 years. And she's been riding for 20+ years.

I just read 5 different reports from the US and UK about fatal and non-fatal injuries attributed to working with horses.

One study in the US was done over a 3 year period 2001 - 2003 by KE Thomas, JL Annett, DM Bixby-Hammett. They studied the records of 66 hospitals and then extrapolated the results to the general population so it's not exact but still very telling!

**Here's some of the shocking numbers:**

1. There were over 102,000 non-fatal horse injuries between 2001-2003 in the US.
2. Injury rates were higher in females (about 60%)
3. About 66% were injured while riding a horse due to falling or being thrown off.
4. Most injuries were to head/neck (23%), lower extremity (22%) upper extremity (21%)
5. About 25% were fractures of some kind
6. Here's a shocker: for **EACH YEAR approx. 11,500 sustained traumatic brain injuries.**

In a UK report by JR Silver for both UK and US statistics regarding spinal injuries while riding, he found that:

1. Horseback riding is a dangerous recreation where **1/3 of the accidents result in head injuries.**
2. In 10 States in the US there were over **200 DEATHS per year.**
3. Riding horses is 20 times more dangerous than riding a motorcycle based on the hours riding.
4. You are 20 times more likely to be injured if you are jumping vs. leisurely riding.
5. About 20% of those going to the hospital were admitted.
6. There were 6 head injuries for every one spinal injury.

In all the studies I looked at there were more women being injured than men. But that is to be expected there are many more women riding than men.

Finally another US study was by the Children's Safety Network. Many of these numbers are sad:

1. Between 1999-2002 there were 76 fatal injuries to youth under 20 years. The most frequent cause of death and serious injury is head injuries.
2. Over 23,000 youth (under 20) are injured every year.
3. The severity of equestrian injuries is greater than other sports-related injuries.
4. Between 20% - 30% of the injuries are while dismounted while leading, grooming or playing around the horse and most of those are by being kicked.

Let's bring this down to earth - what should we do about it?

**Here are a few points you can ponder:**

1. **To wear or not to wear a hard shell helmet.** With so many injuries and deaths caused by head trauma it can literally save your life. I know it's not sexy and all. But why do you think football players, motorcycle riders and race car drivers wear helmets? I do not wear a helmet unless working with a known buckor or troubled horse. My choice.
2. **Understand how to handle horses** and how to work around them.
3. **don't put yourself in dangerous situations** like in tight stalls where you can be kicked, squeezed, etc.
4. **Train your horse so they respect your space**, you have control over them and you can command them.
5. Train your horse so they won't be so spooky.
6. Be able to stop and **completely control your horse** don't let them head for the barn at 50 mph as the fence posts go wizzing by.

It is imperative that you learn to train and control your horse from a colt on up. Your ability to command your horse and control them while leading, handling, riding, etc. is not an option. You literally are putting yourself in harm's way if you don't.

When it comes right down to it, the process of training your horses is not rocket science. It can be done with some good, basic instruction that anyone can learn. It not only makes handling horses safer it also raises the value of them should you ever want to trade or sell them.

\*Copied from internet link:

<http://horsetrainingresources.com/blog/?p=8>

## **Suggestions on Dealing with Unhandled Horses:**



Don't get frustrated when a horse runs from you or jumps away scared. Handling a horse for the first time can be dangerous. Be careful and have an escape path if needed. The best thing you can do for a horse is to help take the fear out of him. They are born with this fear for survival, by helping them deal with it better, you will help them become a great horse and make their later training easier. (See think like a horse)

Horses that have not been handled can be so scared that they are very dangerous. Not because they are mean, but because they are flight animals and run when scared. If a horse has not been handled, it has obviously been neglected and they will be scared of humans. Therefore, your goal will be to remove that fear. Don't do this by sneaking around or trying not to do anything that may scare the horse. Always act as naturally as you can around a horse. If you sneak around, are very quiet, and slow, the first time a person acts normal around that horse, it will be spooked and scared. Sneaking around horse sets them up for failure.

Horses love treats, carrots work well to help train and get your horse to respond to you. Sweet feed/grain, which you can get at any western feed store, will also help to befriend a new frightened horse. Use the same bowl and feed them a cup a grain, two or three times a day. In about two or three days they will want to see you coming with the feed bowl. You may have to do this when they are not together with another horse, so there are no arguments over the food. Feeding them grain (sweet feed), giving them carrots will get them to like you, connect you with food and not fear you. You have to be able to handle horses for medical care, worming and feet care. Horses that have been neglected and not handled probably, normally have not been wormed. This is really important for the health of the horse. If you are not giving a new horse grain, you should start doing that. Start off with little amounts, maybe a cup twice or three times a day. They will really like this and think it is candy.

When you grain a horse, put the grain in a feed bowl and set it in the same spot each day. Horses like it when they know what to expect. They get into a routine, which is good in this case. However, if you were to let your horse walk every time you tried to mount the saddle, that would be a bad routine. In the round pen put the grain in the center. Don't put it in a corner of a fence or next to a fence, where a horse could feel trapped or cornered. If you have time do this three times a day. On the first two times just put it down and just leave. Don't try to touch or call the horse. They will learn fast what it is in the bowl. Use the same bowl each time. After they know what it is, they will want more and will be happy to see you. You can also get some powder wormer that you can add to grain so you can worm a hard to catch horse without catching them. This will help with their health since the worms are stealing many of the nutrients from any food you are feeding.

Once you have the sweet feed started, slowly work up to getting closer to the horse. Each time you feed the grain don't completely leave. In the round pen, put feed in middle, walk, and stand outside. Next time, put feed down and stand at gate on the inside. Next time stand only half way to gate, etc. Soon you will be next to food when the horse is eating. Don't talk or say anything. Horses don't understand and that may spook them at first, talking will come later and they will know your voice and learn to trust it and accept it.

Once a horse gets comfortable with you, they may start getting in your space (I really don't like that term) let's say getting too close for your comfort. A horse needs to learn to give to pressure, so all you should have to do is point, click, or touch the horse and he should yield. What I do for this is I point and click at the hips if they don't move, I move toward the hips with an aggressive look and demeanor, click, point and then maybe pull the head to me causing their butt to move away. That will make their hips move. Finally, I will point click, move at hips and then pop the hip with lead rope, if they don't yield. Whenever I say pull, I never hang on the rope and continue to pull steady. I pull and release so the horse will not feel trapped. A pull is almost like a tug and slack, tug and slack. You don't want to slack if the horse is pulling away from you, but if it moves just a little the way you want, slack immediately but be ready to not let him pull the other way. This is more about timing and feel, which is hard to explain and comes with time and experience.

If you cannot get close to a horse after trying food, you can rope a horse in the round pen and move their feet in different directions until they are tired of running and then give them release at the right times. This would teach the horse to come to you for release of pressure. This is

the method I would use for wild mustangs or any unhandled horse. Once you get good in a round pen, you will not have to rope and can do this without a rope. You have to know and understand how to round pen a horse so you don't confuse the horse. A horse does not lead if it is scared or fearful. Some horse have been hit, yanked, dragged, or beat for leading too close, moving too fast, getting too close and all of that would confuse the horse. If you take some time, most horses will follow you without a lead rope.

I lead all my horses without halters or ropes and most will lead with a hay string around their neck if I need it. This is because I never pull them, yank them or chase them. You have to make the horse want to be next to you and make them feel safe, and then they will want to be next to you. And you have to teach them to give to light pressure. A lot of people just stop training once the horse gives to pressure. That is not good enough. You should always try and see how little you can to get a response. If a look works, I don't point. If a point works, I don't use a rope. If a word works, I don't use body language. If body language works, I don't use a word. I see so many people screw up horses by not know when to stop.

Another method if a horse ties well, is to tie them up and walk away. Come back every five minutes, just pet the horse slow and soft, and then walk away. The more you do this, the more you will let the horse know that when you approach, you will not hurt them, you will not require anything from them and you will pet them lightly or give them a treat. After the horse calms down and accepts your approaches, you can bring them a small carrot or other treat. Pet the horse and then walk away. They will soon start looking for you and want you to return. If you do this 15 times in an hour, you will be able to untie the horse, walk away and he will follow you without a halter. WAIT; don't try this unless you are sure the horse cannot get into trouble if it spooks and runs off. Don't ever pull a horse or make them follow you. Always suggest and try the least amount of pressure to get to your goal. Try to pet them and slowly walk away to the end of the lead rope and hold out a piece of carrot and call her. A horse is a reflection of it's handler. If it is high strung, jumpy, disrespectful, it is because the handler causes all of these things. The calmer you are when around a horse, the calmer the horse will be. It is never the horses fault. Calm is not sneaky and quite, it is not mean, rude, loud, or annoying.

Once you can touch the horse, touch it everywhere all the time. Rub your hands down the legs, pick up the feet, rub the belly, handle the ears, eyes, mouth, tail, back of legs and front legs. This will get the horse used to being touched anywhere and will help with later training. Pick out the feet everyday so when the farrier comes, she will be used to having her feet handled. After she is comfortable with you doing all this with your hands, start using other things. (See Sacking out) The more you do this, the more the horse will know that no matter what you do, you will not hurt him and he does not have to be scared of you.

The answer to the what are the only two things that horse's are scared of is... **Horses are scared of two things, things that move and things that don't move**, to horses either one can be a predator and either one can eat them. So don't get mad at a horse when he gets scared, it is their nature to stay alive. :) So remember when sacking out a horse if you stop moving something, that can provoke a fear response. So once you get a horse used to something moving, don't forget to get them used to the same thing not moving.

In the picture below you will notice.....I forgot what I was going to say. Lol, sorry just being a playful gelding and putting something in here for my gelding buddies. :)



### Round Penning:

This is a great help in training your horse. It is seen by many as a way to punish the horse or to wear the horse out, not a good way to use it. Round penning is not chasing a horse with a whip. Round penning is aide to help you learn your horse, to help you communicate with your horse, to help your horse understand what you want and to show and establish dominance and leadership. The photo to the right is one example of where the drive line is located. Some say when you start learning this you should tie a rope around your horse and hang it over the neck and it will remind you since it hangs around the neck about where the drive line is located.



In the horse's world if another horse can make him move, then that horse is higher and is dominant. So the horse will want to cooperate with the higher horse. By being with a higher horse, the horse feels safer and will look to the higher horse for direction and guidance. The herd instinct drives this and tells the horse to be with a herd for numbers and safety. More horses mean more eyes to see danger. More horses means some horses can rest and relax knowing that if danger comes the other horses will alert me by calling or running.

The photo below is where I like to picture the drive line, I look at and stare at the shoulder when moving a horse forward or changing directions. Both photos are close to being as right as right can be. The horse will tell you where his drive line is and as you work and move him you will learn what he responds to best.



So with that in mind, you have to remember that round penning is not to create fear in the horse, it is not to wear the out or to punish the horse. It should be used to teach the horse. Fear and pain do not teach trust. Beatings do not teach. Big painful bits do not teach. Having a horse submit to you teaches the horse you are higher. Moving a horse's feet teaches a horse you are higher. Stopping a horse from moving teaches a horse you are dominant. Changing a horse's direction teaches a horse you can control his feet. Giving a horse release teaches a horse you understand him. So a round pen is for teaching and learning, not punishment and fear.

When doing a first round penning, let the horse figure out his area. Let him walk around and check out his area, let him figure out that it is safe and he is not in danger. Allow him to walk around free and sniff, paw, roll, or whatever he wants to do. This will take away all his survival distractions and he will pay more attention to you, when you start moving him and giving him

direction. "Direction is better than Correction" You should use the round pen to do other things than just run your horse in a circle. You can sack him out in it, you can groom him in it, you can play with him, you can give treats, you can ride him, you can teach him tricks, you can just sit and watch him, if you only use it to chase a horse then the horse will soon become "sour" (just think it is for chasing) and you lose the benefit of the round pen.

The advantage of the round pen is it takes away corners, removes choke points, removes places where a horse can stall or stop running. Since it is round you can keep pressure on the horse until YOU want to give release. If a horse learns that it can give itself release, then it learns that you are not the leader and it does not have to listen to you. So if you were to try and round pen in a large pasture, the horse could simple run away, give himself release from your pressure, and then learn to ignore you and not respect you and not see you as a leader. In a round pen, the horse can only run in a circle, can not escape your pressure, so it learns (if it is done right) to come to you for release, it learns to look to you for release, it learns that running does not get him release. This is the key to round penning, **a round pen is used to teach a horse to come not to run.**

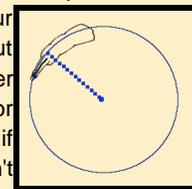
This picture is another example of a drive line. I stress this (driveline position) a lot since it seems to give many people problems. The drive line is near the shoulder and neck area NOT the butt. Yet I see all sorts of people and trainers still swinging a rope at the butt or using a whip at the butt or feet to get a horse to move. This only confuses a horse since another horse does not do this. If you watch other horses move other horses in pasture, they use the "driveline" to change a horse's direction and to stop a horse. "The horse is best teacher of the horse". You use pressure on the drive line to get a horse to move, unless when you ride your horse you carry a whip and plan on hitting the back feet to get him to move. You must keep your training on the ground consistent with your training under saddle. I can put pressure on the shoulders with my legs or knees or a pop with the reins if I need to do that. But that will be consistent with what I do on the ground. If I use pressure on the butt, hips or back feet to get my horse to move in the round pen, then I confuse the horse when I get in the saddle and try to get him to move.



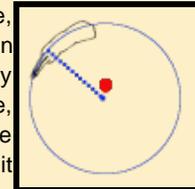
As your horse is checking out the round corral (round pen) you can relax, walk around like you are safe and like you are checking out the area. The horse may come over to you and say hi. The horse may start following you around. It may stay away from you and want you to follow him. Be aware of what you are doing and what you are causing the horse to do. **Awareness is one of the most neglected** areas in horse training. Everyone wants to tell the horse what they are doing wrong and do not look at what we are doing wrong or we are causing things to happen. **"Everything your horse does when you are with him is normally a reaction to what you did."** Be aware that your movements are either putting pressure or removing pressure to your horse. If you do not understand this, then you are setting your horse up for failure. **\*\*This is very important to understand "EVERYTHING YOU DO, YOU ARE EITHER PUTTING PRESSURE OR REMOVING PRESSURE" and your horse knows it.** When you feed, when you catch, when you call, when you talk, when you look, when you face him, when you look away, when you flinch, when you step back, when you raise your hands to protect yourself, when you move your head away, when you turn your back, when walk to them, when you walk away from them, EVERYTHING counts and "the horse knows".

So if your horse moves away from you, he is moving away from pressure, be aware of what you are doing to create that pressure. I always here "my horse did this for NO reason". This tells me that the person does not understand horses. They do not understand what they are doing to cuase the horse to do what it does. This is why horses get blamed and get reputations of being spooky, bad, mean and other stupid names given to horses by people that don't understand horses.

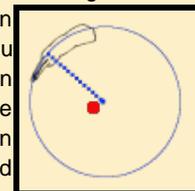
Driveline, what is it and how to use it. The driveline is the point on your horse that makes it move forward, stop, or change directions. It is like a cut off point. It is normally in the area right behind the front leg and shoulder area. Some say it is in front of your front saddle cinch and some say it is the front leg. You have to figure it out on your horse. When lunging a horse you should be behind the shoulder when your horse is moving forward. Horses know where you are looking or focusing on. If you are looking at the shoulder, the horse will know this, if you look at the butt, the horse will know this. **Looking is pressure** don't forget that. Looking is pressure. So if you look and move your body towards



a horse, they feel pressure and may move away (or in advanced horsemanship they pay attention and look for direction). If you look and are holding a carrot then they will come to you; different pressure, different looks. A carrot is a drawing type of pressure, much like returning back to the barn is a drawing pressure or hearing grain in a bucket. These things will cause a horse to move to that pressure. By understand the difference between pushing pressure and drawing pressure, you can use this to help teach your horse what you want. Never blame the horse for doing something, learn what you did to cause the horse do what it did.



The three photos on the left explain drive lines. The top photo shows the drive line from the center to the shoulder. So with the imaginary blue line, you need to be behind it to get forward movement and in front of it to get a stop or turn. The red dot is you and in photo #2, you are asking for forward movement from the horse since you are behind the drive line. In photo #3, you are asking for a stop or turn since you are in front of the drive line. If you are in front of the drive line and moving towards the horse then you are asking for a turn, if you are in front and just stop, then you are asking for a stop, stopping forward movement of the horse by being or moving in front of the drive line.



**Moving your horse in the pen is about pushing pressure. Having your horse come to you in the pen is about drawing pressure. Knowing the difference will help your horse understand what you want.**

To know if you are round penning correctly you will have to see how the horse is responding. You should be able to have your horse walk, trot and canter without chasing the horse. You should be able to speed up and slow down your horse with minimum movement by you. You should be able to have your horse stop and face you. You should be able to have your horse come over to you. You should be able to have your horse do inside turns and outside turns. An inside turn means the horse turns into the center of the pen facing you as it turns to go the other direction. An outside turn is when the horse turns into the fence away from you so his butt is facing you as it turns to go the other direction. Some will tell you that if your horse puts his butt to you he is being disrespectful. Not true. If you ask your horse to do an outside turn, he is doing what you asked, he is not being disrespectful.

So how do you get your horse to do all this, you learn to talk with your body language. Using your position on the drive line, using your energy (impulsion), using your facial expressions, moving towards the horse and away from the horse. You can also give additional cues with your voice or sounds (clicking or kissing or saying walk or trot). If you just try and use a whip, it will not work and you will be chasing or using fear and intimidation to move your horse; that is not communication and it will NOT build trust or respect. Remember that working a horse in a small enclosed area (round pen) can be tough on the horse's joints and legs. Keep sessions reasonable, not more than 30 minutes and give the horse lots of release and rests. Don't keep the horse running in one direction for too long or it could result in an injury. Normally more than 5 times in one direction is too much. Remember it is about changing directions, getting stops, getting speed changes (up and down), getting the horse to look to you for release, getting your horse to come to when called, having your horse back away from you, teaching your horse to understand you, to know your body language, to respect you and to see you as the absolute leader (head horse).

Round penning should be fun and relaxing for you and your horse. It is all about talking and working with your horse. Showing your horse that you are higher and you call the shots. You teach the horse how to respond to you by how you do things the same way. Consistent movements teaches what you want, tells the horse what to expect, so the horse finds comfort and ease. Horses love habits and routine, they like to know what to expect and what is going to happen "before it happens". By making sure they know this, you set them up for success. By being inconsistent, you confuse the horse, you teach the horse not to trust you, the horse will always be guessing what is going to happen. That means he cannot relax or be comfortable, he will learn frustration and resistance. He will be on edge wondering what will happen, he will wonder what you want, he will wonder what you are asking, he will not have trust or confidence in you as a leader without consistency.

If your horse is not relaxed in the round pen it is YOU causing this. If he is jumpy and running wildly it is your fault. If he ignores you and just kicks out and runs from you, it is your fault. The horse is only reacting to what you have taught him. If you change the rules, if you are not

consistent, if you are not aware of your body position, your movements and your signals, then they will mean NOTHING to the horse. So your horse will ignore you and your signals, why, because YOU have taught him to do so. Remember a horse is like a child, they need constant direction and guidance. Without it, they are forced to live in a world of confusion, always looking for a leader, never being able to relax and feel safe, knowing what to expect. And I see this all the time, by owners want to be nice and kind, they want to think they can get the horse to love them with treats and good care. Horses want direction, they want a leader, they need correction so they know boundaries and know what is expected. Round penning helps them figure this out, if YOU teach it consistently and correctly.

So the next time you watch someone round penning a horse look at what you see critically. Notice the person and see if they are chasing, intimidating and using fear or are they using knowledge and communication to get the horse to respond to their cues. Do they know how to get inside and outside turns, does their horse look to them and follow them, does the horse look relaxed and like it is responding or is it just nervous and reacting to being chased. Remember that there is a big difference between a reaction and a response.

#### **The Difference Between lunging and Round Penning:**

**Some think they are same, they are not, they teach different things and show control of the horse differently. lunging is basically round penning on a line. There are some big differences. Since a horse is on a line when being lunged, it has to do "inside" turns only. The horse will also turn into you with his head. This is good since it teaches a horse to follow his head, to give to pressure of the lead line, rope or lunge line. By making a horse follow his head, it teaches him to give to pressure and to follow his nose and or head. This is what you want a horse to do when you are riding him. So this is setting a horse up to succeed, it is teaching a horse to follow his nose, so when you are riding and you direct rein (plow rein) it teaches a horse to give to pressure and follow his head.**

**There are other advantages to lunging, it allows you correct and take the horse's head away, you can jerk or pull the horse's horses head, giving a correction, if the horse starts to buck, kick out or ignore you. "Be Careful" with this power, if you use it too much then the horse will learn to ignore and fight with you, so always use correction very carefully. However, if a horse is not giving to pressure and is not stopping when you ask and move in front of the driveline, then a correction is needed "IF YOU ARE SURE THE HORSE KNOWS WHAT YOU ARE ASKING". If you correct when you are messing up and not giving clear signals, then you just confuse the horse and the correction is nothing more than abuse, nagging and serves no good purpose.**

**The purpose of lunging has many reasons, but all horse "training" or work comes down to making the horse and you better, increasing communication and understanding so to improve your relationship and safety with your horse. The goal should be to control the horse with light and soft touches of the lead line not to pull and yank the horse around. So by round penning and learning how to use your body and communication you then transfer that communication to your lunging. You lunge a horse using your body and only use the line to help the horse understand and to control the horse from running away and giving himself his own release of pressure. Soon the horse learns to follow his head, give to pressure of lead rope (lunge line) and to read your body movements. Once you are good at round penning, then you get better at lunging and then you learn how to talk to your horse when it is on a line. So leading and sending become easier.**

**Let me explain "sending". Sending is talking and communicating with a horse to have him walk in a certain direction, go to a certain place, to turn in a small area, to walk between you and obstacles. So once you get good at lunging you should be able to move your horse in a direction and at a speed you choose. This helps in keeping your horse safe. It helps when trailer loading a horse. It helps when walking a horse through gates or small areas, it teaches you control and gives your horse trust to follow and listen to you. So some good sending exercises is having your horse walk between you and a pole or between you and fence or you and car, or you and door way, anything that would normally make a horse feel trapped, you can now control the horse and have them walk between you and any object or obstacle. The way your horse gets used to following his head, giving to pressure, moving where and when you want and you both gain confidence. Other things you can do is stand in a gate way and have your horse**

enter the gate, turn and then exit the gate, all while you keep your feet plated. You move the horse and you do not move. You can stand outside the gate and have your horse enter and then turn and face you. Then you have the horse walk back out the gate and turn and face you. You send the horse in the trailer and have him turn and face you and then come out of the trailer. You can send the horse in the stall and have him turn and come out or turn and let you take the halter off. Sending shows control, sending tells a horse you control his feet, sending tells you horse you know how to talk to him in a way he understands and that makes him feel comfortable and he learns to trust you and learns what to expect. He learns to look to you for direction and that shows a partnership and between you and your horse.

So lunging is really just sending, it is just most people see it as making a horse run around you. Much like many see round penning as just making a horse run circles. They are both much deeper than that and both teach many lessons in trust, communication and can improve the relationship between you and your horse. Some people think if they round pen they don't need to lunge, others think that if they lunge, they do not need to round pen. Both teach different things and both cause you to spend time with your horse, both improve communication, both help the horse understand you better and feel safer and both teach you how to better understand and communicate with your horse.

#### Can Using a Round Pen or Riding in a Round Pen Hurt a Horse?

I get this question a lot and like most horse questions, the answer is "It Depends." When trying to answer horse questions I normally look to wild horses first. Of course, I realize that our domesticated horses are not wild, but their body, movement and internal systems are still designed for and from living in the wild.

So, are there round pens in the wild, no? Do horses run in circles in the wild, no? Therefore, my initial answer would be horses are not designed to run in a circle and do not do this in the wild. Those that like using a round pen and only know how to use it their way and somehow find control in doing in using it, will come up with many justifications on why using a round pen is all right and works best. You do not ask a barber if you need a haircut and do not ask a car wash if your car is dirty. People tend to take position that helps them. A big problem in the horse world is there are lots of know it alls, life long horse owners and people that think they got it all figured out. Unfortunately, for the horse, this does not normally work out well for the horse.

The horse is best teacher of the horse. I will always listen to a horse over any person. Understanding what a round pen does, will help you understand why I think it is over used and how it can do damage to horses. A round pen gives control and advantage to humans. It prevents the horse from running away and giving himself relief. It prevents choke points or corners so the horse cannot be trapped in a corner, which can cause a horse to jump or fight. Round pens enable a horse to move their feet, not get trapped, not find a place to relax or find comfort and allows you to keep pressure on a horse while allowing a horse to move his feet. All this is good for the human but can create problems for the horse.

When a horse runs in circles, they have to lean into the turn and are normally on one lead. This type of constant or long distance running creates pain and excessive pressure on joints, bones and tendons. Some say you should never do more than four circles without changing direction, others say no more than six and I say circles are best when done the least. The number of circles is not the problem, the circles are the problem. By putting a number on what is accepted, tends to make many new horse owners think as long as I change directions, I can run my horse for an hour and it will be fine. That is the problem. Circles are NOT good for horses so they should NOT be done for any extended length of time. Like most things with horses, less is more. Of course, if you ride in a round pen the damage can be increased significantly. Your weight and the equipment weight puts more pressure on the horse, joints, tendons and bones. Your balance can put more pressure, restricting the horse's head can throw the horse off balance and create more pressure. Depending on how well or bad you ride, is

another factor as well as how fast you ride. If you are walking slowly, obviously that does less damage than running fast, stopping fast and turning fast.

New horses owners see things, learn shortcuts, and then think that is the only way to do something. That way they never learn to grow with the horse, they only learn to do the same thing over and over. This is a good way to desensitize a horse and once a horse figures out you do not know what you are doing and you are only doing the same thing, that is when that thing loses its effectiveness. However, by understanding a horse better, understanding what you are doing and what the horse is thinking, you learn that a round pen is NOT magically or the only answer to all horse issues. A round pen is not the best and only fix for what you perceive as a horse problem. The round pen is cheat to give you an advantage and help you teach a horse to pay attention and to come to you and look to you for release. A lesson that is rarely taught since most just chase a horse in circles.

Too often, the round pen is used as a torture device to punish and harass the horse. It is mistakenly used as a way to wear the horse out, make the horse tired, to teach a horse a lesson and show the horse who is boss. All bad, all wrong and all do damage to the horse and your relationship with the horse. But Rick, my horse will not listen unless I make him run around and get him tired. That is what you may see, that is what others that do not know may see and that is what many may tell you. What is really going on is you do not understand what you are teaching and what the horse is learning, you do not know any other way to get better results, so you do that same thing and your horse does the same thing. If you want your horse to change, you have to change what you are doing.

Therefore, when I am asked does a round penning a horse or riding a horse in a round pen hurt a horse, it depends. It depends on how often, how much, what are you using it for, how long you do it, what is the reason you do it, what results you are getting and do you think you have to do it or do you just want to do it.

It always amazes me when I see new horse owners ask people for help who have the same problem they do. If a person has a horse with the same problem as your horse, then know as much as you, since neither of you can fix it. It is not the horses; it is the people. So do not ask people for help with the same issue or problem that you have. It may make you feel better and both of you may agree that it is the horses, but both of you do not know or there would not be a problem. So when you see someone fixing all their problems in a round pen by running the crap out of the poor horse, you need to realize they do not know what they are doing and they do not understand a horse. And before some dummy tells me, but it works, many bad things work and get results from horses, it does not make right or good for the horse. If you are round penning your horse more than once or twice a month, you are probably not using it correctly. I may round pen my horses once a twice a year. I do not need a round pen to have a horse that listens.

In closing, round pens can a good tool to use for some things. It is not a good fix all for all professed horse problems. When a round pen is used sparingly and correctly, it can help communicate certain things to a horse. When used as a correction, harassing or punishment device, it can do damage to a horse, cause physical injury and tear down your relationship and communication with the horse. Can a round pen hurt my horse? It depends.

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### **Understanding Horse Tests:**

Tests can be as slight as walking away from you, swishing you with a tail, throwing a head at you, pinning ears at you, walking over you, stepping on you or moving the butt to you. They can be as severe as biting you, showing you the teeth, kicking at you, charging you, striking at you or aggressively chasing you. The more you ignore or miss the small test the more likely the test will get more severe. Horses are sizing you up as soon as they meet you. From the first time they see you they are wondering if you are

higher or lower in the pecking order. Now they have to confirm what they think, so they test you.

All horses are better when you first meet them, they don't know you and have to feel you out and see if they are smarter or you are smarter. In many cases, the horse wins. Not necessarily that they are smarter, just that the people don't realize what is happening until it is too late. When a horse is pawing and not wanting to stand still for you, that is a test. He is seeing if you allow him to get away with that, if you do, he will test you more and more. The test will get harder and harder. Soon you will be saying your horse is bossy or your horse is stubborn or your horse likes to misbehave or your horse disrespects people or your horse is an alpha. None of this will be true. So, when a horse tries to put his foot down, that you are holding, you either held it too long for his level of training or he is testing you and does not respect you enough to hold it up for you without resistance or he thinks he can put it down when he wants too and you cannot stop him. Your first thought might be to hold the foot up longer, the better approach would be to pick it up and put it down before he resist, that way you teach him that if he does not resist you will put down his foot. From there you work on holding it up longer and longer. If you hold it too long and he starts to resist and he gets his foot away from you or you put it down while he is resisting, you just taught him that if he resist, you will put his foot down, bad lesson, and it is not the horse's fault.

When you brush your horse, he wants to paw or lift his back leg when you brush his under belly. Let him paw and lift his back leg, he will get tired of both and he will stop doing it. If you keep brushing and don't stop while he is pawing or lifting his leg he will learn that doing this gets him nothing. When he stops doing those things, then you stop brushing and he learns that if he stands still, you will stop, if you stop when he does those things you teach him to do those things to get you to stop. If you react to things a horse does, like hitting him or popping his leg with a rope or trying to make him stop doing those things, then he is teaching you to stop what you are doing, so he is training you. As long as he can't kick you, let him hold his leg up, too many people let a horse distract them from what they are doing. When a horse does something other than what you want, ignore it and stay focused on what you want and don't stop (pressure) until he does what you want. The old saying never start something you cannot finish is very true. Some horses will appear that they will never do the right thing so the trainer or owner gives up. When this happens, you just taught the horse that if he acts up and resist long enough you will give in. The horse just trained you. Horses are professional people trainers; they do this by instinct, in the herd they are always teaching each other so they get good at it. People who don't understand them, miss the signs, people don't speak horse language and then blame the horse when things go wrong. Therefore, when a horse paws, kicks, bites, swishes his tail, throws his head back, or resist you, he is testing you. He is being a horse and talking to you in horse talk, he is seeing if you will listen to him. A horse wants to escape pressure, anything you do to him creates pressure. Some pressure he is OK with him, like bringing him a carrot, he allows this since he gets something out of the deal. He does not kick at you or try to push you, he may try to take the carrot aggressively, but normally he won't run away from a carrot.

Everything you do with a horse you either teach him something or unteach him something. If I pull a horse around on a lead rope, I teach him he has to be pulled in order to follow me and he learns not to be soft and not to follow me when I ask him or call him. Therefore, I teach him to be pulled around. However, if I never pull or force him with a lead rope and I get him to follow me by talking him, moving his butt away from me, calling him, give him a carrot, make him want to follow me, then he learns that the lead rope is not his enemy and he will not fear it or run when he see it. I don't want a horse seeing a lead rope as a way to catch him or pull him around. We teach a horse how to act. When someone tells me their horse is stubborn, then I know they are stubborn, when they tell me their horse is stupid, they are stupid, any name someone gives their horse is a description of themselves. So when someone has a kind, gentle, respectful horse then I know that is how the horse is handled. Horses are a reflection of their surroundings and owners. They are reactionary animals so they act as they have been taught.

My horse won't trailer load! He is scared of the trailer, he does not like small places, he does not like to step up, he is scared of ramps, he has had bad experiences in a trailer, and the excuses are endless. If you stop putting pressure when a horse is doing the

wrong thing, then you teach a horse the right answer is what they were doing when you stopped pressure. A horse won't load if he is not given the right cue and does not respect the person loading him. I have heard that if your horse wants to run back to the barn, make him run and then turn around and walk him away. You teach a horse to run to the barn if you let, allow or make a horse run to the barn, period. If you pull back on the reins and the horse rears and you stop pulling, you are teaching your horse to rear. If a horse tries to bite you and move away, then your horse just learned how to make you move away. If your horse puts his butt to you and you move away. Your horse knows how to make you move away. When around a horse you have to be on your toes and always be aware of what you are teaching. In addition, if you think you are not teaching anything, you are wrong, you are always teaching. I just sit on my horse and do nothing, what am I teaching. I am teaching that my horse needs to stand still when I am on him unless I ask him to move. I am teaching that if my horse stands still I will not put pressure on him. I am teaching that it is ok for the horse to do nothing and to just stand still. Remember you are always teaching something, even if you are doing nothing.

I tell everyone to work on himself or herself and their horse will get better, if you fix yourself, you fix your horse. Every thing your horse does wrong, you caused it, so if you look at problems that way you learn to cause the right behavior, horses make you think and they make you improve yourself, they give back what they get. You have to be aware of everything you do around a horse, no matter how small you think it is, they see it, they notice it, and they learn from it. In the wild they have to do this to stay alive, they are prey animals and their keen sense of awareness and ability to take notice of everything that happens around them, enables them to stay alive and not be eaten, so they don't miss much.

As for bits, I don't like them. If this horse can be ridden in a halter, I would work him and ride him in an enclosed area in a halter. A halter will force you to be more aware and use other things to control him rather than the cheat of a bit and pain. A bit is false sense of security, if you can't control him in a halter; it will only get worse when you cause pain with a bit. A bit is not natural. From a halter, I go to a bosal or side pull. I use a halter to teach the horse to respond to pressure and to give to pressure without pain. Then after I am sure he knows this, I will move to a bosal or side pull. That way I know the horse knows what to do so I can require more of him. I see and hear people starting horses in a bit. I think this is bad. New horses make mistakes, if a horse causes pain from a bit, he learns to associate bits with pain and hurt. Then you get into other issues about taking the bit, fearing the bit, not respecting the bit, associating the bit with the rider and it goes downhill from there.

If someone tells me their horse is getting a little sloppy, I say you are getting a little sloppy. Look to yourself. If you require him to better he will be better, if you are better he will get better. Stop blaming horses for what you cause. The first sign of a good horseman or horsewoman is they never blame the horse, they accept responsibility for any bad behavior their horse does. If you are not confident, you horse will not be confident, for good reason, horses want a strong leader so they know they are safe. You would not want a blind person driving a car you were in. For good reason, the blind will probably crash soon. A horse does not want a weak leader that they can't trust, they don't want a blind person driving them around either. So if you learn more about a horse, understand how they think, make yourself better and your horse will feel safe and love you for it.

### **Release, Timing and Feel "The Big Three":**

Wow, talk about big topics. I call this "The Big Three. These are sometime mystical terms that are used often and most people never really understand them, never know their importance or never experience them. These things come from "Time". Time handling horses, time working horses, time riding horses, time watching horses, time making mistakes, time seeing others do it right, time seeing others do it wrong, time listening to the horse and time reflecting on all of this.

Sounds like double talk. Sounds like old horse whisperer stuff. Are these things really real or is it something that old timer's just talk about to intrigue others. Let's talk about

each one of these since I think they are all connected and all affect each other. So I will try and discuss them individually.

-- **Release:** Anyone can pull or yank a horse, but it takes someone who understands how to release, and how to release with timing and feel to really get results. Release is that exact moment where learning takes place in the horse. The second a horse gets release, he connects that release to the right answer. So if a horse is pressured by a person and it rears and as soon as it rears, it scares the person putting the pressure, so the person backs away in fear of their safety, the horse sees this as release. So the person gives release, but with bad timing. The horse does not know this, it only knows, it got release when it reared, so rearing gets him release, therefore, rearing must be the right answer. This is an example of bad release but since release teaches, the horse always sees release as good.

Good release teaches the right thing. So if a person tries to get a horse to back up and puts pressure to back up and as soon as the horse takes one step back, the person releases, and then the horse learns that backing up is the right answer. If the person stops pressure when the horse turns away, rears, or tries to bite them, then the horse thinks and learns that is the right answer. So knowing release only works if the person knows how and when to release pressure. Almost everything a horse learns is by pressure and release. An example of a horse learning something without pressure and release is more "classical conditioning". You break a carrot in half, the horse hears this, knows what this is and comes over to get the carrot and you give the carrot to the horse. However, this could be seen by the horse as pressure and release if you are not careful. If done wrong, the horse can see him coming over to you as putting pressure on you and then you giving the carrot is release from his pressure on you. Everything with a horse is how they see it. This is a Key Point.... it does not matter what you intended to do, what you do or what you think you did, it only matters how the horse sees it. Too often I see people teaching things they do not know they are teaching and then wonder why the horse does it.

So understanding release is very important so you can know what you are teaching, when you are teaching it and when you did it wrong. And remember, once you understand release, if you do it with bad feel and timing, it means nothing and you will be teaching something you did not intend to teach. Confused yet? We are just getting started.

-- **Timing:** Sounds like a clock thing; if you can tell time you can have timing? If you can hit a baseball, drive a car or play any sport you should have some sort of timing. So having timing with a horse should not be that difficult. Well, timing could be a horse book in itself. Timing comes from doing wrong, experience (good and bad) and many other lessons from many horses. Pull on a horse at the wrong time and you get a fight, pull too early and you create the horse to pull, pull too late and you get behind the leverage point and you get dragged or get the rope pulled out of your hands. Of course pulling requires release, so if you time it right and don't release right, you blow it.

On the other hand if you have timing, you can get a horse to do things twice as fast, twice as easy and twice as good. Wow, this sounds pretty important, why are so many people so confused about it? It takes time and practice to learn it, develop it, perfect it and refine it. Every horse requires it to be done differently, maybe just a little but each one responds to timing with different feel. So having good timing with bad feel does not work, having good timing with bad release, does not work. All three are required, all three have to be constantly adjusted and all three need to be refined depending on what the horse does and how the horse responds.

-- **Feel:** This is putting timing and release together with constant adjustments. So, lets look at this like kissing a girl (girls apply this to guys), a kiss is a kiss right? Kiss your wife good morning is different than kissing her goodbye. Kissing her after not seeing her for a month is different than kissing her after a hard day of work. Kissing her after giving birth to your child is different than kissing her for getting you socks for your birthday. Kissing her after she is in a car wreck is different than kissing her after you broke her favorite silly glass thingy collection special piece. Kissing her after you say "I do" is different than after she says "No you can't". And lastly kissing her after or during that special private time is also very different. So if someone said how many ways can you kiss, your first response may be a kiss is a kiss, but if you think about it and break

it down, very little changes in timing and situation changes the feel and way you kiss. And of course, I kiss my horse differently than I kiss my girl. :)

So just applying feel to a kiss you can see it has many variables. Now lets apply feel to how you handle a rope, how you put on a head stall, how you catch a horse, how you saddle a horse, how you pick a horse's feet, how you handle a horse in general, how you ride a horse, how you handle the reins, how you move towards a horse (pressure), how you move away from a horse (release), how you look at a horse, how your body is used to influence a horse and understanding a horse can feel and shake a fly off his hip. If you are thinking how can anyone know all this, welcome to the world of horsemanship. No matter how long you do it, you are always learning from each and every horse. You never know it all and the journey is never-ending.

Then how can anyone claim to teach this? I have not seen too many that try and teach feel. Tough subject and not easy to learn. This would explain why so many people have so called "problem horses". You may hear things like, soft hands make soft horses. You can't pull a horse to softness, but if you don't know timing and release, feel will not matter.

Remember the first time you drove a car and tried to use the brake. You locked it up and pushed way too hard. That is because you lacked feel. The more you drove the better you became, the more you could touch the brake without slamming it on, the more you control you stop by slowing gently and then coming to a stop. That is feel. I mentioned handling the reins earlier. Feel is so important here. Too rough, too loud, too soft, too easy or too inconsistent will all result in confusion to the horse. When a horse is confused for too long it will stop trying to learn and stop searching for the right answer. Then they look at other cues as picking or harassment and then they can become upset or they feel (different kind of feel) that there is no right answer and they can't find release so they go into fight mode if they cannot flee. So feel on the reins can very helpful or can teach bad lessons. Being soft at the right time, firm at the right time and consistent will teach a horse how to be soft. But all this needs to be with timing and release.

Let's see if I can tie these together now. A good example of using all three of these would be catching a horse. How many times do I hear the same old story, "my horse won't let me catch him", "my horse is hard to catch", "my horse just runs away when I try and catch him", and my first answer to this is "STOP trying to catch him".

In order to catch a horse you need release, timing and feel. You need to know how to release pressure when the horse looks at you or faces you. You need to release this pressure with timing so the horse connects the release with the looking or facing you. You need feel to read the horse on how to put just enough pressure to create movement and just enough release to draw or stop movement. So when catching a hard to catch horse, a person with understanding of release, timing and feel can catch most any horse. And since a very common complaint is how do I catch my horse, this tells me that most do not have a clue about the big three. Can I teach you this? Can anyone teach you this? My answer is the best teacher of the big three is the Horse. Listen, watch, and learn from the horse and stop trying to teach, train and improve the horse. Always remembering, "The best teacher of the horse - is the horse."

### [Buying Your First Horse](#)

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**First Horse Warning:** If I had a dollar for all the first horse stories that turned out BAD! Buying your first horse is an adventure in survival. As long as there are new horse owners there will be shysters, rip off artist and so called horse traders, ready to take advantage of you. Do your homework and don't get taken. Horses are the most used animals of our time. Today they are used for money. Be aware and very suspicious when buying or looking at horses, it just may save your life. Here are some things to be wary of and to hopefully help you see the red flags. If a seller does any of these it may be trouble.

-- Bring a friend, an extra set of eyes and ears can be very helpful. Bringing someone with horse experience is even better. They will ask or have questions that you may miss

or forget. Later you can talk about things and remember things together. There questions may trigger a questions you wanted to ask but may have forgotten.

-- Never see a horse just once. See a horse at least three or four times. Make each visit at different times and without prior notice to the seller. If the seller insists that you must call or let them know before you are coming, RED FLAG. This could mean they want to wear the horse out, drug the horse or work the horse before you arrive. They may be trying to hide something and that is why they want early warning that you are coming. See if the seller will allow you to lease the horse for a month or two to see if you guys get along and match.

-- Anything the seller tells you the horse can do, have them show you. Never take the word of any horse seller. Anyone who is honest will not be offended, only the crooked will get upset. So if they say the horse can jump, have them show you, if they say he is good with his feet, have them show you, if he rides trails, have them show you. Do not be afraid to ask to see anything, you are buying a horse that could kill you, so now is the time for questions, not after you own the horse.

-- Notice the level of skill of the rider showing the horse. If the seller is wearing spurs, chaps and uses a whip, then realize that is how the horse is trained and if you don't ride that way or that good, then the horse may not be for you. If a kid rides the horse, notice that the horse may not be good at more defined moves and may just know how to go and run, since that is what kids like to do. Is the rider the same size as you, if you are bigger, can the horse carry you, does it have a previous injury that you are not aware of and maybe can only carry up to 100 pounds. If owner states horse can be ridden by anyone, ask for names and contacts of other riders, see if you can see different riders ride the horse. If the rider is a better rider than you, the horse may not listen to you once he figures out that you are not as experienced.

-- Notice the type of control device on the horse, like bit size, what type of bit, how does the horse respond to the bit, is it willing or does it fight it, how hard is the rider pulling on the bit, does the horse look like it is having fun and is willing or is it fearful, scared and appears to be in pain.

Does the horse like the person riding or does act scared or nervous. Are the reins always tight and held tight or does the horse listen on a loose rein and understands leg and body cues.

-- Notice the demeanor of the horse. Is it sick, drugged or showing signs of confusion, lameness or pain. If this is your first horse, you may not know what to look for, which is why it is a good idea to bring someone with experience with horses, that you trust. Even if you have to pay someone, it will be money well spent.

-- Does the seller offer a 30-day return on the horse. Get it in writing and get GOOD ID from seller. Get a social security number and or a Driver's license number. Getting the license plates of any vehicle or trailer is good idea and also an address. See if the address matches the address on the driver's license. I can assure you if the seller is a crook, he will not have any of this and will be reluctant to provide any of this.

-- Bill of sale: ALWAYS get one. Make sure it has good information in it. Name of horse, age, birth date, any papers on horse, any markings on horse, an attached current picture of horse, Driver's license number of seller, name and address of seller, work, home and cell phone of seller. The more information you get the better. If this horse drops dead or is found to have some huge medical problem later and you cannot identify the seller, you will not be able to get any money or assistance, this is very important. Watch out for good excuses, like I left my wallet at home, this is a friends house, this is a buddies trailer, I am selling this horse for a friend, the owner is sick so I am just helping out, this horse was given to me so I don't know much about it, there are a million great excuses, don't fall for them. Take a picture of the seller holding the horse, take a picture of the seller, take a picture of the horse trailer with license plate, the more you do the better the chances that you are dealing with a legitimate seller. The more you do and the more info you request, a crooked seller will start to get nervous, will want to leave and will not want to sell you, don't get offended, be happy, you just got saved a lot of grief.

-- **Must sell today:** this is a huge **RED FLAG**. The horse may be stolen and this is not a legitimate seller. This seller is looking for a fast sell, fast cash and looking for a gullible buyer that does not know horses or horse traders.

-- **Look at the condition of the horse's feet.** Any good horse owner will take care of their horse's feet. So if the feet look bad, you can bet the owner has neglected this horse and there are other issues. Even a bad seller and lying fool will get the horse's feet done before trying to sell the horse. If the feet are bad the seller is bad, be aware. Bad feet could also be a clue that the horse will not allow his feet to be handled or that he may be a kicker or a Farrier may refuse to work on the horse. This should not be a deal breaker and can be fixed, so this fact alone should not stop a deal.

-- **See if the horse is clean and well-groomed.** Is the coat brushed, is the horse cut up, are any cuts doctored or have medicine on them. If the horse is kept in a pasture or a stall or if the horse is kept with other horses, could justify some of these conditions. But all of these together will paint a clearer picture.

-- **Ask how long the horse been owned, how many owners, was the horse ever sold or bought at auction.** Most auction horses are neglected and sold by jerks. Anyone that would sell a horse at auction does not normally care about the horse. The sellers at most auctions see the horse as just an animal and not a partner or a friend. A caring owner will care about their horse. They will not sell a horse at auction, not knowing who the buyer is, where or how the horse will be kept or if the horse is going to a good home. When you sell a horse at auction, I can buy the horse to take it to a slaughter house and sell it for meat. A caring owner will not normally do this. The less time an owner has owned a horse, the bigger the **RED FLAG** should be.

-- **Have the horse saddled and bitted while you are there to see it.** If the seller has the horse saddled, bitted and sweaty before you arrive, **RED FLAG**. This means they did not want you to see how bad the horse is when he is fresh. If you really want to know a horse, see him fresh and see how he is handled while saddling and putting the bit in. This is where you will see if the horse is man-handled or is trained to fight and only knows force, fear and pain.

-- **Does the seller ask questions of you indicating that they care about the horse?** Like where is the horse going, what will it be used for, how will it be kept, what type of fencing do you have, do you have a barn, is the horse going to be kept in stall or pasture, etc. If the seller is asking these questions then they obviously care about the horse and want to make sure the horse will be well cared for and has a good home. However, with that said, the good crooks will know to fake ask these questions to make you think they care, so be aware.

-- **Have the seller pick up all four of the horses feet and pick out the feet in front of you.** This will show you if the horse is comfortable with this procedure, does the horse kick, has this been done regularly, does the horse resist it and you can see if the horse has good soles and good frogs. If the horse does this well, then you need to do the same thing in front of the owner. Don't have the seller hold the horse, have the horse secured the same way it was secured when the seller did the feet. The horse should show no more resistance to doing this than it did for the seller. If the horse gets more excited, then that may be a clue that it is scared or fearful of the seller and you will be seeing the real horse.

-- **Pick up the tail and feel for resistance.** First have the seller pick up the tail of the horse. Have them run their fingers in the tail like it was being groomed, looked for resistance in the horse's tail and ears. After you see and feel comfortable, you go over and pick up the tail. You will see and feel if the horse is nervous, tense, scared or comfortable. The tension in a tail will tell you a lot.

-- **Trailer load the horse.** This is the most troublesome problem to lots of horse owners. Have the seller load the horse and unload the horse a few times. Not just once, at least three times see the horse walks in and out of the trailer. You will see if the horse is comfortable or scared. You will see if the seller used whips, chains or other pain or fear devices to make the horse load. If the horse does not load nicely, **RED FLAG**. If it does load nice, then you try to load it.

-- Asking for money to hold the horse or asking for partial payment too early in the process. A "horse trader" knows that the more you ask questions, the longer you take to make up your mind, the more likely you will find out that he is trying to take advantage of you. So by getting you to pony up some money early, he knows if you back out, he will keep your money and then will be in a better position to deal you the horse.

-- Have the seller lunge the horse on a lead rope. This will show if the horse is controlled and knows how to lunge. It will show if the owner knows how to do this and if the horse respects the owner. If this goes well, then you do it and see if the horse respects you. If this is your first horse, you may not be proficient at lunging. Try it anyway, this is a good time to see how the horse deals with frustration and with different handlers.

-- don't be in a hurry to buy. This is a life time investment. Take your time, make sure it is right. Know as much as you can before you decide. Time is your friend. don't be rushed or forced to make a fast decision.

-- I found this picture of a horse for sale. This horse is advertised as a good all around horse, that is great with kids and very kind and easy going. It looks pretty and that will attract many people looking for a pretty horse. Just from this picture I see "red flags". Can see what why? First look at the way the horse is being held. A stud chain in the mouth is not needed on a kind and easy going horse. Notice the lead attached to the chain, it is tight and pulled, which means this horse is being pulled to stand, which means he is not soft and does not give to pressure. If he gave to pressure, he would be moving forward to give to the pressure of the chain. He is bracing against it, which means he will be bracing against a bit or rider. Just seeing a stud chain and the fact that the person holding his horse is out of view tells me this seller as something to hide.



None of these things mentioned above should be a deal breaker alone. However, the more of these that are present, the more you need to be suspicious. These are guidelines and will not guarantee you get a good horse, but it will help prevent you from getting took and possibly getting hurt. All horses are good. But some have issues that need to be dealt with by an experienced horseman and not a first time horse buyer. Good luck and hope this helps. If you have questions, feel free to email me.

### **The Horse Competence Learning Model:**

The following information is a learning model about the four stages of learning and how it relates to horses:

- 1- Unconscious Incompetence (I don't know what I don't know)
- 2- Conscious Incompetence (I know that I don't know)
- 3- Conscious Competence (I know what I know, when I think about it)
- 4- Unconscious Competence (I know without thinking, instinctive)

I have attached a link to another site for this at the bottom of this page, but I have adapted this model to the horse world.

Most horse owners think they are in stage 3/Conscious Competence. They get there by the fact that they have bought a horse, read a book, rode a few times or attended a clinic. They have the attitude that they have been there, done that, and know all there is to know about horses. This prevents further learning, since they are unwilling to admit

their lack of knowledge or the importance of this knowledge. They are really in stage 1/Unconscious Incompetence, but until they admit this, they cannot move to stage 2/Conscious Incompetence. When people operate in stage one, horses and people get hurt and horses are blamed for the person's unconscious contributions to any accident or injury.

You must be able to admit that you don't know it all, in order to begin to learn something new. If you continue to blame the horse for your mistakes, then you will never move up to Unconscious Competence. The following explains all four stages with examples of horse situations at the end:

#### Stage 1 - Unconscious Incompetence

-- You are not aware of the existence or relevance of understanding the horse, how it thinks and how it reacts, and do not care since you have not seen a horse get killed or a person get seriously injured, or since you have been lucky and not hurt yourself.

-- You are not aware that you have a particular deficiency in understanding horses and may believe you are at the conscious competence level.

-- You might deny the relevance or usefulness in understanding horses since you think you already know how to show the horse who is boss.

-- You must become conscious of your incompetence before learning can begin, until then, this is where people say I have owned horses all my life, therefore I know it all.

-- A trainer or horseman must try and move you into the conscious competence stage, by demonstrating the skill and getting you to recognize that you are the problem and not the horse, they must get you to admit your incompetence so you can move to stage 2/Conscious Incompetence, where learning can begin.

#### Stage 2 - Conscious Incompetence

-- You become aware of the existence and importance of understanding the horse, its prey instincts and how it lives with pressure.

-- You become aware of your deficiency in the knowledge about the horse and know you can get hurt if you don't develop the skills to safely handle a horse.

-- You realize that by improving your knowledge of the horse, your ability to safely control the horse and your effectiveness with horses will improve.

-- You have a measure of the extent of your deficiency in understanding horses, and a measure of what level of skill is required for your own competence.

-- You make a commitment to learn and practice understanding and thinking like a horse and to move to the Conscious Competence stage.

#### Stage 3 - Conscious Competence

-- You achieve conscious competence in handling, controlling and riding horses and can perform it reliably at will.

-- You will still need to concentrate and think in order to perform the skill and it has not yet become second nature.

-- You can handle most any horse without assistance

-- You should be able to demonstrate horse handling to other, but are unlikely to be able to teach it.

-- You need to continue to practice handling horses and commit to becoming unconsciously competent with horses.

-- You need to practice since it is the single most effective way to move from stage 3 to 4.

#### Stage 4 - Unconscious Competence

-- Handling and dealing with horses becomes so practiced that it enters the unconscious parts of the brain and it becomes second nature. (Common examples are driving, sports and typing)

-- You can handle multiple horses or horse situations at the same time, like holding a horse and giving directions to someone riding or lunging.

-- You may now be able to teach others how to effectively handle and train horses, after time of being unconsciously competent you might actually have difficulty explaining how you do it, since the skill has become largely instinctual. (Reactionary or without thinking)

-- This arguably states the need for long-standing unconscious competence to be checked and periodically tested against new standards and new methods.

So let's talk about some examples:

1) I have owned horses my entire life, so when I lead three horses and drop the lead rope, the horse steps on it and rears and I get hurt from a horse head to the face, I blame the horse for pulling the rope out of my hands and for not knowing how to lead. (Unconscious Incompetence)

2) I get on a new horse that I know little about and it gets scared and runs, I can't stop it and it runs into a fence and gets hurt. I blame the horse for not listening to me when I told it to stop. (Unconscious Incompetence)

3) I am picking my horse's feet, I am talking to friends and not paying attention, another horse walks by since I was not paying attention or did not know or see the signs, my horse kicks at the other horse and kicks me in the leg. I blame the horse for not respecting me or for kicking or being stupid or scared. (Unconscious Incompetence)

4) I put up hotwire and don't teach my horse what it is or how to move from it and the horse gets shocked and runs through it, tears it down and tears up the fence. I blame the horse for being stupid and not knowing how to avoid the hotwire. My attitude is the horse will learn when he gets shocked. If he gets hurt, it is his fault for being stupid. (Unconscious Incompetence)

5) I go to get my horse out of pasture and when I open the gate, I let another horse run out or over me. I blame the horse for not respecting me or being mean and I blame the owner for not teaching their horse not to run over me. (Unconscious Incompetence)

6) My horse spooks at a scary plastic bag. So I am going to show my horse that I am boss and he can't be scared so I put 50 plastic bags in his stall and on his walls. I'll show him for being scared and being a horse, this will teach him a lesson and he learn not to spook at plastic bags. (Unconscious Incompetence)

For each of the previous situations, I will explain the difference in response for the different levels so maybe it will be clearer as to where you are and where you want to be and where others are:

Situation 1: Horse steps on lead rope, rears and hits me:

Conscious Incompetence: I know that accidents happen with multiple horses, I know I get uneasy with multiple horses, so I only lead one horse and if I lead two and something happens, I know it is my fault and not the horse's. I try and do better next time and learn from it. I may others experienced horse people to help me.

Conscious Competence: I know the capabilities of each horse, I am aware of my lead ropes and keep them out of the way of the horse. I am consciously looking for things that may spook the horse and cause an incident. I am thinking ahead and being aware of all lead ropes, all horses behavior and know to stop and re-evaluate the situation if it looks like a wreck is about to happen.

Unconscious Competence: I lead three horses knowing that if I drop a rope the horse

will react, how he will probably react, I stay of the way and am ready to move, I keep rope and horses controlled and are ready for unplanned events. I do this without looking like I am thinking about it and it is almost second nature, so when something might happen I react faster, without thinking and prevent it from escalating and getting worse.

**Situation 2: New scared horse won't stop and runs into fence:**

**Conscious Incompetence:** I know the horse is new and make sure he stops in the arena and around barn. I know my riding is not that good to stop a runaway horse, so I don't take horse anywhere that is not comfortable for me or him until I can read and control the horse better. I realize that my horse or I can get hurt if I go too fast or push too hard.

**Conscious Competence:** I know new horses can get nervous and scared and I am aware of his behavior and I pay close attention to him so I can read him before he bolts and redirect his nervousness before the horse reacts. I am constantly looking and reading my horse for "tells" about what he is seeing and thinking. I am actively aware of my surroundings and my horse's demeanor. I pay close attention to his ears, tail swishing, speed, how high his head is and other things he does before he runs off, since I have worked on this and know it is a area we are still learning and dealing with. I know if I put the horse in a situation and he runs off, it is my fault for not seeing it or preventing it and it is never the horse's fault.

**Unconscious Competence:** I am always expecting the unexpected with new horses or any horse in a new place. I look for and unconsciously feel when my horse is about to react and I redirect him to a place of comfort and safety, so he will not react. I do this without thinking about it since I have done it a 1000 times before, I have trained my body and eyes to read horses without thinking about it, it is second nature and I know horses are always communicating and telling me what is going on around them, so even if I am talking to someone else, I feel my horse is excited, nervous, anxious or not comfortable. I can sense this without trying or thinking about it, since it is second nature, then I do little things, that most people would not even notice, to being the horse mentally back to me.

**Situation 3: Picking a horse's feet and he kicks at another horse and hits me by mistake:**

**Conscious Incompetence:** I am aware that my horse does not like other horses or that he may kick if provoked, I am on guard and make sure I am aware of other horses that may be approaching. I don't get into conversations since I have seen my horse kick and know that all horses will kick, so I am actively thinking and aware so I can move out of the way or try and be ready to react. I realize I don't have control over this so I just try and avoid it.

**Conscious Competence:** I know my horse or any horse may kick and I look for signs that he is not paying attention to me, I keep his attention on me, I give him direction when I see him paying attention to other horses, I secure his foot and prevent a kick if he starts to kick. I may warn the other approaching horse or owner to prevent this. I know if my horse kicks, I know I can get out of the way or prevent it. I make sure I am in a position to stop it or correct it and give my horse direction so the kick does not happen or it is stopped before a second or multiple kicks happen.

**Unconscious Competence:** I move around the horse with confidence, the horse sees me as his leader and knows to pay attention to me, the horse will not kick since I have made my position known and that I am higher in the herd and my horse will not kick when I am holding his leg. I am reading my horse without thinking about it, I can sense what he is thinking and what is about to do before he does it. At the first sign of trouble, I am confidently moving to a position of advantage where I can prevent it, stop it or correct it. My body position becomes more dominant and my horse sees this and pays attention to me and not the other horse. My horse and I are constantly talking and communicating with our bodies, so others may not see or know what is happening, but my horse knows. All of this happens without much thought and almost instinctive and it all appears normal and most people (even people who have owned horses their entire life) will never know it is happening.

Situation 4: I put up hotwire and the horse runs through it:

**Conscious Incompetence:** I know that horses are reactionary creatures that flee from pain. I ask advice of others, I do research about the pros and cons of hotwires, I may try other things to stop the behavior so not to get into trouble or get my horse into trouble. I know if my horse gets hurt and scared he will react and I may not know how to handle it so I try and go slow and prepare as best I can.

**Conscious Competence:** I know horse's don't react to pain well and have learned that horses stop learning with pain. I may try other methods, that don't involve pain, to stop the unwanted behavior. If I decide to use hotwire, I will introduce it slowly and help my horse understand, I will put it up and teach my horse to move back from it when it gets shocked. I may try and set it low so the horse can learn at a low shock and then turn it up as the horse learns. I won't allow the horse to be set up for failure and allow him to run through it and learn a bad behavior.

**Unconscious Competence:** I have seen too many horses get hurt due to hot wire, they get trapped, they stuck, they panic, it normally creates more problems than it fixes, half the time it does not work or breaks or grounds, so I know horses learn to test it, horses get bored and will try and go around it and get caught and react to the shock and it will cause more problems than it will fix, so only use it as a very last resort and in an open area where if it causes a reaction, there is less chance a horse will jump, roll, fall or get trapped (like in a small stall). I know hotwire is cheat that is easier for me and rougher on the horse, so as a horseman, I don't use cheats to set my horse up, I take the time it takes to fix the problem in other ways. I know how a horse thinks, I know if I was a horse how I would want to be treated, so I try and do what I would want done to me.

Situation 5: I let a horse run over me while getting my horse out:

**Conscious Incompetence:** I know that I am not that good at backing up horses. I know that some horses intimidate me and that I lack the confidence to control multiple horses at a gate at feeding time. I approach the situation with the knowledge that this can go bad, that horses are going to try to get out and I have to be ready to stop, to close the gate or to try and get aggressive and back the horses away from me. I may take someone with me it looks too bad or wait until I have help. I know if I get over my head that I can't blame the horse since I caused it.

**Conscious Competence:** I know horses will be horses, I expect horses to try and test me at the gate. I am confident that I can back a horse away so I approach the situation with an expectation that this will happen and I have a plan that will work and has worked in the past. I am thinking of different things that can happen and which horses will be more aggressive and which ones to do I need to concentrate on. I enter the gate and pasture with authority and confidence and I know most horses won't test me, but I am ready with my plan for the one that does. And when a horse tries, I know it is not personal he only being a horse and I have to be smarter and not blame the dumber animal.

**Unconscious Competence:** I am fully aware that all horses like to come in to eat, I expect it, I understand it and I would do it if I was a horse and knew I had fresh hay and grain waiting for me. So enjoy watching the horses be horses. I approach the gate sending clear body language that I am the herd leader and I have a mission. I enter the gate confidently constantly sending non-verbal (body language) that I am the herd leader, give me space, don't approach me, I am giving stern looks to horses that are overly excited and wanting to approach me, I am ready and may move aggressively or swing a rope to make a point, I will not focus on any horse that is being respectful and not pushing or trying to approach me. I do all this without thinking about it, it is almost natural and second nature. People watching will not see it or know I am doing it, but will make comments that "horses like me". If a horse gets out, I take full responsibility for not preparing or being aware enough and for letting it happen and never blame the horse.

Situation 6: I put 50 plastic bags in my horse's stall since he spooked:

**Conscious Incompetence:** I may think this is teaching the horse a lesson. I may take it personally that the horse had the audacity to spook at plastic bag with me. I know that I

know understand why the horse did it and think that if I put plastic bags in his stall it will show him not to be afraid of them. If I see the horse is nervous and can't relax, I will take them down and realize I am making my horse more fearful and this is not working and I may need to ask someone for help with this problem.

**Conscious Competence:** I know that horses spook at things. I know that if my horse is confident in me, his spooks will be less and less and I have the ability to control him when he spooks. I will use proper sack out techniques to build the confidence in the horse and remove fear. I know that I can't get my horse to stop spooking at everything, so I just work on how I deal with it. I practice my calmness and keeping and having a good seat when I ride. I work on sacking out routinely. I don't take shortcuts and easy way out. It takes more time to work on sacking out than it does to just throw 50 bags in my horse's stall. So I work on myself and how to deal with my horse's natural fear instinct so we grow together.

**Unconscious Competence:** I see plastic bags before my horse does since I am always looking for possible dangers, just like my horse. I think like a horse, so if I see something that appears odd, I know my horse may think that way. I have worked on my horse and know that no matter how he reacts to scary things, I know I can control him, I can stop him, I can keep my seat and deal with it. I try and show him that things are not going to hurt him, but I know he is reacting to real fear and I understand this and work with him, together, to get over or to get better. I know I feed my horse hay and he loves alfalfa and is not scared of alfalfa and I never sack him out on alfalfa, but I know that if a flake of alfalfa falls out of a tree while I am riding, it will scare me and my horse. I know we will get through it together and I can't make my horse "bombproof". I can prepare for unexpected things and deal with it fast and instinctively without much lag time for thought.

I just found another example of Unconscious Incompetence. A horse is brought into a stall every night and his food is waiting for him. So naturally, the horse gets into a habit and wants to get to his stall for the food. This is a good thing. This will help your horse come to you, will help him learn where his stall (food) is and will teach him a routine. So a person comes up and tells me that her horse is getting pushy on the way to his stall, so she was told to remove the food and that way the horse will not be in such a hurry to get back to his stall and that way he will not be pushy. This is so simple to me, but may not be for others. The horse is not being pushy because of the food, he is being pushy because he can, because he is allowed to be pushy, because the person is not making him NOT be pushy. To blame the food is to blame the horse, it is neither, it is the person who is not giving good direction, it is the person that is not stopping the pushy horse, it is the person that is not showing the horse that it cannot be pushy, but the easy choice is to blame the food. Not only is this the wrong way to fix this, this action will make this worse. Here is what will happen next. The horse will learn that he gets no food when comes in, so he will have no reason to come in, so he will stop coming in from pasture when called, then the person will blame the horse for not coming and will lock the horse in the stall to teach it a lesson for not coming, then the horse will develop other vices from always being locked up, then the owner will blame the horse for the vices and the downward spiral will continue and the quality of life of the horse will forever be lost.

**THERE YOU HAVE IT!** If you read all of this you should have a better understanding of the horse and maybe will strive to move the conscious competence level and over time will be naturally move to the "Unconscious Competence" level. You may be at the Unconscious Competence level now in some areas, like putting your horse in a stall, taking it out to pasture, feeding you horse, picking his feet or saddling your horse. Since you do these daily they may be second nature and you may not think about them much. Getting to this level in reading your horse and communicating/talking with horse is where you will see your horsemanship grow and advance. But it won't happen if you think you already there (Unconscious Incompetence) or if you don't actively work and practice doing it. Spending time and watching horses is an investment. Study them, read about them, watch them, watch others handle them, handle different horses, ride different horse, ride and work with problem horses (people problem horses), watch others take lesson, the more time you are with horses the more you will learn from them. Hope this helps improve your relationship with your horse.

Link to the four stage learning model: [Click Here](#)

## Let's talk about Cheats:

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I use this term a lot in the horse world. Synonyms of cheat are to defraud, to take advantage of, con, trick, swindle or deceive. So when I use this term to refer to different things people use on horses, people get offended or insulted. This is not a personal issue. Most any cheat can be an effective aid if used in moderation with a good thinking horseperson, with the goal being to use it short term. I will list a few cheats that I see used too often with horses; A stud chain, a whip, a martingale, draw reins, spurs, tie downs, bits, pain and fear. Hold on, I know many are thinking, wait a minute, I use some of these and I am not a cheater. Remember what I said earlier about moderation and thinking. There are many other cheats in horse training and after reading this you may identify others that you did not see as a cheat before.

Let me discuss why I think a cheat is a cheat. A stud chain causes pain; it is designed and used so it can cause pain to get compliance. Can it be used and not cause pain, yes, but if it is available, the likelihood it will be used for pain is there. If it was not available, then it would not be used for pain and you have to learn how to get what you want without pain. So I hear all the time, I don't use it, he just knows it is there or if he listens then he does not get it used on him (pain). Both these statements are cheats. What is really being said is I don't know any other way to control my horse so I use what is easy, fast and works. The easy way is rarely the right way. The right way normally takes more time and more effort. So by taking the easy way, you cheat. We all do it, I have done it and still do it sometime, but it needs to be the exception and not the rule. When you cheat, you cheat your horse and you cheat yourself. I can take most any horse being led around on a stud chain and lead the horse better and with more control with a simple rope halter, in less than ten minutes. Not because I am special or have magical power, but because I understand horses, I know if I was a horse what I would want, I know that if I take a little more time, I get a better final product.

When you only use cheats or over use them, I think you take something from the horse. You change the horse in a way that you never get back. You change the very being and steal some of his soul. Who would want a horse that will not move unless told, will not think on his own, has no personality, will not react to anything and is basically a mindless robot that you sit on and bark off commands? It seems too many people are always chasing this type of horse.

Most problems with horses (really people) come down to time, being in a hurry and lack of knowledge. If people just slowed down, took the time it takes, it would take less time. The slow way is the fast way with horses. Most cheats are used for faster and easier results. So you may think it helps in the short term, but overtime, cheats become less and less effective. Not only do people start relying on them, but horses start relying on them. Ever see a horse that has always had a tie down, if you take it off, the horse is almost lost and fearful. Most cheats do not improve your relationship with your horse, it normally damages it. So overtime when cheats stop working, they are normally used more and with more effort, since people have become dependent on them. The more you use a cheat the less effective it becomes. You can desensitize a horse to just about anything. If I slap a horse in the face every time I see him, sooner or later he will expect this, know it is going to happen and will stop trying to prevent it. So if you constantly correct a horse with a stud chain or a bit, sooner or later your horse will expect it and ignore it. Or at some point he may decide enough is enough and hurt you. Hard hands make hard horses.

I think if people are more aware of cheats and the cheats they use, they will be less likely to over use them and will be thinking of ways to get the same results without the cheat, getting more from your horse with less. For example, if I can get a horse to lead well with a rope halter, then I can try and get him to lead well with just a rope around his neck. Once he is good at that, then I can try and get him to lead with just a piece of hay string around his neck and once he is good at that, then I can get him to lead with nothing. By looking at most horse training this way you are always working your horsemanship (horsemanship) and you are constantly improving. If you take care of your horsemanship, your horsemanship will take care of you. When you improve

yourself, your horse improves. When you and your horse understand each other your partnership grows and everything you do with your horse seems effortless and like a dance. You would never find beauty in a dancer, if a whip was used to make the dancer dance.

Know your cheats, use them sparingly and always try to stop using them, so you don't have to depend on them.

### **Horse Training Sayings and What They Mean?**

If you read about horse training, articles, books or talk with people about horses, they will commonly say things that may sound like double talk, cute sayings or fancy horse talk some say. There are many old horse sayings about horses and training and they are used frequently, but not really understood. If you don't know what they mean, you probably don't know the importance of their meaning. I have listed a few here, some of them you may have heard, some maybe not. But if you hear them in the future, you will understand what they mean, hopefully understand their importance and will be able to apply them better to help you and your horse. If you learn to understand these you will understand horses better and can apply these to make yourself better. You will understand why it is so important for you to get better by the end of this article.

All of these sayings are interconnected and all affect each other. If you can imagine a spider web and piece of the web is one of these sayings, then you see how each one makes the other ones stronger and more effective.

So let's take a look at some old horse training sayings and try and apply some deeper meaning to them besides just the words.

**The Slow Way is the Fast Way with horses:** This is critical in any horse handling. If you rush something, if you get in a hurry, you increase the chance of a wreck, *you set the horse up to fail* and since *you did not take the time it takes, it will take more time*. If you teach the horse small steps, allow small successes, give release for those successes, always rewarding (release) for the smallest try. By doing this you help the horse know what to expect and the horse will know *what is going to happen before it happens*. Knowing this makes the horse feel safe and establishes a routine and trust. By going slow you limit confusion, you give the horse time to understand what you want, what you are asking for and you *help the horse find the right answer*. If you don't rush training, the horse will learn faster. Horses find comfort in knowing what to expect, they don't like surprises and they like routine. Going slow makes us better and *when we get better our horses get better*.

**"If you get better, your horse gets better":** Work on yourself more and not the horse. If you get better communicating and understanding horse, your horse will reflect that. When you are giving good direction and leadership your horse will do better, *a horse is a reflection of you*, if you do it right, your horse does right. If you *ask the question right, the horse will give you the right answer*. When you work on yourself, you accept responsibility for what you cause the horse to do, *you get better and your horse will get better*, since *a horse is never wrong and it is never the horse's fault*.

**"It is never the horse's fault" or The horse is never wrong:** *A horse is a reflection of the person handling him*, if the *horse fails you failed*, if the horse does something wrong, you did something wrong, when you stop blaming the horse, looking for excuses, you look to yourself for the problem, therefore you will work on yourself, *you will get better and your horse will get better*. If you accept wrong or bad results as your fault, you will be more willing to change what you are doing and *if you want change in a horse, you must first change*.

**In order for your horse to change, you must first change:** Since *a horse is only a reflection of you*, if you do good, your horse will do good and if you do bad, your horse will do bad. You must be able to recognize and accept this so you will change what you do, when something is not working. If you blame the horse when things go wrong, you will never change what you do and your horse will never change what it does. Then the cycle continues and the horse suffers. Admitting that you cause all actions from a horse you handle, gives you the ability to know that *you must change in order to get your*

**horse to change.** If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got.

**If you take the time it takes, it will take less time:** By going slow, since *the slow way is the fast way*, you take more time by slowing down, doing it right and the end result will come faster than if you get in a hurry and confuse the horse. Confusion will cause a wreck and that will create fear and destroy trust. When you lose trust it will take twice as long to get results, since you will have to undo all the wrong you did when you tried to do it in a hurry. So, *when you do better your horse does better*. And since *the horse is never wrong*, you *set the horse up to fail* when you get in a hurry and it takes more time since you end up doing over and over again.

**Set the horse up to succeed and don't lead him down a path to fail:** This means don't just try things and see if they work since most of the time they will not work. If you don't know what you want or what the right answer is, how can help the horse find the right answer? When you try, the horse will fail since you did not *take the time it takes* and do slow proper steps so the horse can learn the right answer. If you plan, *think like a horse*, then you will break the training down into small steps, small successes, so you can teach the horse what to expect, lead the horse right where you want him to go, so he can find the right answer. By giving good direction you help the horse find the right answer and avoid correction. That is why *direction is always better than correction*. When we help our horse succeed, we *get better* and when that happens *our horse gets better*.

**Listen to the horse or The horse is the best teacher of the horse:** Everyone wants to train a horse, everyone wants to make their horse better, everyone is always so busy trying to make their horse learn or do something and they rarely take time to *listen to the horse*. A horse will tell you if you do something right or wrong. They will tell you if something works or does not work. They will scream this with confusion and wrong responses and all too often no one hears them and no one listens. An example of this is reaching too fast to pet a horse and the horse moves away. People that don't know will the horse is head shy, people that know will change what they do, move slower and will help the horse not move away, so the horse can learn the right answer. When a horse tells you something and you ignore him, he will not trust you, he will know that you don't understand him, he will know that he can't trust you since you do not speak his language. Watch and *listen to the horse*, *the horse is never wrong* and they always tell you what works and what does not work. *The horse is the best teacher of the horse*.

**A horse has to get scared so it knows it does not have to be scared:** If you *think like a horse*, this one is easy. A plastic bag blows by, a horse snorts, jumps and prepares to run or runs off. We know it is only a bag and will not hurt a horse, but a horse has to get scared, this fear is what has kept them alive for thousands of years. You can't take that out of them. So understanding this, we know that all horses get scared, we get scared, and we need to help horse deal with their fear a different way. We need to teach them that is OK to be scared, but they can't react like a wild flight animal when scared. We need to help them see that fear is normal and not all fear will kill them and they don't have to run when scared. We can't do this if we try and avoid scary things, if we beat them, or we scare them more and cause pain when they get scared. We have to let the horse get scared and show them that it will not be hurt, show them trust and we will help them deal with their fear, by being a strong and confident leader who gives *good direction and not correction*.

**Direction is better than correction:** If you pay attention, if you give continuous feedback to the horse and if you make sure the horse knows what to expect, he will be less likely to make a mistake. By giving good consistent direction you help the horse find the right answer and prevent if from making a mistake, which means you prevent having to correct mistakes. *When your horse fails you fail*, if you do not pay attention and you allow your horse to get into trouble or make mistakes, then you have to correct those mistakes. However, if you are active, paying attention and giving good direction, you avoid corrections. This is better for the horse and better for your relationship with your horse. So when someone is constantly correcting their horse, they are not giving good direction. Which means they do not know what they are doing and they are not giving good direction or getting better or paying attention to what the horse is telling them? Which is why *when you get better, your horse gets better*.

**Trust your horse and your horse will trust you:** This is a big one that is far too common. Horses are big, strong, fast and reactionary animals. It is easy and reasonable to have some concern when you don't understand them. Fear is crippling to having your horse trust you. Horses know they are food for others, they are hyper alert and extremely sensitive, they have to be alert to stay alive, so they do not miss anything and *they know what is going to happen before it happens*. So when you think you fool a horse, when you think you can act not scared and the horse will not know it, you are wrong. Your fear only increases their fear. Your fear shows you as not confident, your fear says you are not a good leader and not someone a horse wants to put his trust/life in. You see it all the time, someone is scared of horses and they try and act tough, they try and cover their fear, they try and fool the horse and they really only fool themselves. These are the most dangerous people to be around and work with. They do not listen, they do not think, they do not learn, they are paralyzed by their fear, which comes from a lack of confidence, lack of knowledge and lack of trust and then they expect their horse to trust them and believe in them, when all the time they are lying to themselves, others and the horse. A horse will not trust you if he fears you and you scream loud and clear that you do not trust a horse since you fear them. Fear gets more people and horses hurt than just about any other thing. Yet a majority of older horse owners are scared to death of getting hurt and in all their wisdom they pick horse ownership thinking it will get them over their fear, when in reality all it really does is *set the horse up to fail. When your horse fails, you failed*. You cannot succeed with horses if you fear them. You will never see a good horseman scared or nervous of horses.

**Most horse problems are really people problems:** Since a horse does fine in the wild where no people are around and since horses only have problems when people are involved, it only goes to reason that horse problems are caused by people. There is no wrong or right in the wild, there is only survival. So when we put horses in domesticated environments, nail metal to their feet, box them up, isolate them, ride them in pain bits and keep them in unnatural environments, they develop problems, none of which they had before we (people) got involved. Everything a horse does, every situation a horse is put in, every time a horse gets hurt, panics and runs or does some other natural horse thing, people want to blame the horse and not accept that they caused or set up what happened. With that mindset, people never change what they do, since they blame the horse and don't understand that they cause every thing that happens with a horse, which why *a horse is only a reflection of what you do and if you want your horse to change you must first change*. Once you accept this, you change and *you get better and so your horse gets better*.

**It will always get worst right before it gets better:** When pushing horses past their limit, when trying to un-teach bad learned behavior, some horses can be very resistant, some will have learned this so well that they are unwilling or unable to change. They have been made stubborn, resistant, stiff or dangerous, and they have learned the lesson well. Bad horses are not born they are made. So these horses can have the toughest problems to fix (help the horse). It is still *never the horse's fault*, but since a horse will fight some things, if they were pushed too fast or abused in the past or are more fear driven because of bad handling, or some studs or stallions are very strong willed and all of this can be tough to overcome. So this saying, *it will always get worst right before it gets better* means some horses will fight their hardest, resist their most, right before they give in. It is like a last ditch effort to survive, resist or get freedom. So it will appear to get worse and then after that final effort, a lot of horses will submit right after their last strong fight. This can happen in many training areas and we should not be fighting with horses, but I think that is where this got started and it has continued over time. The key is, stay focused, don't give up, insist on only one right answer and continue pressure until you get it, no matter how bad it gets. And just when you think it is getting worse it suddenly gets better. If it doesn't, *it is never the horse's fault*.

**A horse is only a reflection of the rider:** This is more of the same, if you do good your horse will do good, if you do bad, or go too fast, or don't *listen to your horse*, your horse will get confused, do bad or fail (not find the right answer). Since *it is never the horse's fault*, you make a horse do all bad or all good. If you change what you do, the horse will change what it does. *Listen to your horse*, it will always tell you if you are doing something right or wrong, simply look at his response. If I raise my hand and my horse runs off, I caused my horse to run off, depending on what I wanted I will assign right or wrong. If I point and ask my horse to move and the horse moves, then I did it right, since my horse did it right. All things come back to what you do and what the

horse does. Since *a horse is only a reflection of the rider*, when you hear someone call their horse stupid, look at them and say look in the mirror. If they call their horse crazy, tell them to look in the mirror. If they have a good horse, they are good. If they have a scared horse, then they are scared, if they have a horse that fights, then they fight. All horses do what they do because of what is done to them. *Bad horses are not born, they are made.*

Bad horses are never born, they are made: All horses are born a horse, knowing nothing but instincts, survival and they are just horses. From that moment on all interactions with humans will either teach good or bad. Depending on the handling, all horses can be either good or bad. But there are many bad horses that were made and now they are labeled. Which is why so many horses have a past (bad handling) and no future.

Release teaches or A horse learns on the release: Horses hate pressure, they are comfort seeking animals; they avoid stress, danger and threats (pressure). A horse will always choose easy over hard, it will walk rather than run, it will avoid conflict and seek comfort. A horse looks for release from pressure or release from being uncomfortable. So by making *the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard*, we use the horse's natural instinct to seek comfort and avoid pressure and this helps the horse find the right answer. So stopping or releasing the pressure or discomfort, we tell the horse what the right answer is. Release with bad timing does not work and only teaches the wrong thing, but understanding how important release is and what it teaches enables us to better communicate with our horses in a language they can understand. If you don't understand how release teaches, you can't talk horse and *the horse will know it before it happens*. Rearing horses are a great example, when people don't understand release and a horse rears, most people will stop what they are doing and move away from the horse so they don't get hurt. So by giving release (move away and stopping) the horse thinks and learns, by rearing I get release, therefore rearing is the right answer, to stop pressure. Soon he knows that when he rears, you will stop pressure and then he *knows what is going to happen, before it happens*.

"A horse knows what is going to happen before it happens": Horses are Kings of observation and they miss nothing and see everything. You cannot fool them or fake them, they know if you know and they know if you don't know. They are exceptional observers. They know because their lives depend on it. If they miss something, they know they will be dead, that is powerful motivation and that is why they are so good at it. *Horses keep you honest*, since they know if you are lying or trying to fool them. They know if you are scared and don't trust them and they will not trust you. They read and see the slightest change in your stance, your mood, your intentions, your thoughts, where you look and if you think you can fool them, they will set you straight ever time. So be aware, *a horse knows what is going to happen before it happens*. If you *listen to the horse* they will tell you they know and *they will keep you honest*, by not allowing you lie or fool them.

Horses never lie or Horses keep you honest: Horses don't know how to lie, they do what they do from instincts and because of what happens around them. They are reactionary animals and have to be taught how to respond with control. When a horse kicks another horse, it is not from meanness, it is not from planning, it is from truth. A kick is pure with no malice or ill intent. When a horse kicks it does so to teach or to protect or from fear. So punishing a horse does not work, they don't understand it. Since *a horse knows what is going to happen before it happens*, they cannot be fooled or tricked and when you try they know it. When they see that you are being sneaky and not honest, they will not trust you. When you are honest your horse finds comfort and responds with trust. When you try and fool them *they will tell you that you did it wrong*.

Your horse will tell you when you do it right: This goes back to *listening to your horse*. If you do something wrong, too fast or too aggressive the horse will tell you, if you listen and watch. Pay more attention to what your horse does after you do something. Then you will know what works and what does not work. You will see when you go too fast or when you make a mistake, the horse will tell you, if you listen and watch. Then you can *change what you do so the horse will change what it does*. If you do the same thing you will get the same results. If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got. If you get success, keep doing what you do. If you get failure, change what you do. This *makes you better so your horse will get*

*better.*

Predicting a horse's response is better than reacting to his response: This comes with knowledge and understanding of horses. If you *take the time it takes*, do small steps and *set the horse up for success*, you will be able to predict what the horse will do. Prediction is better than reaction. This forces you to know the right answer and forces you to give specific direction to get that right answer. Then you can teach the horse with less stress and confusion and you give good *direction and not correction*. The horse learns faster when you go slower. *The slow way is the fast way*. By knowing what you do and what the horse will do helps you predict behavior (good and bad). That way *you can change what you do so your horse will change what it does*.

If you fail, your horse fails: When we do something wrong, our horse does something wrong. If you don't pay attention and you allow your horse to get into trouble you will have to correct the horse. If you do good, your horse does good. If you allow your horse to fail, then you fail. If you do bad, your horse does bad. Since a horse is only a *reflection of the person handling it*, if you succeed, your horse succeeds and *if you fail, your horse fails. It is never the horse's fault. When you get better your horse gets better.*

"If you get the wrong answer, you asked the question wrong:" Look to yourself for the problem, help the horse find the right answer by eliminating the wrong options. If I want a horse to trot and he walks, I have not been clear, I must have given the wrong direction, the horse is telling me he is confused or does not know what I want and now I have to change what I do or give correction. Since *direction is better than correction*, I failed so I made my horse failed. If I ask right, if I am clear and consistent, if I *set the horse up to succeed*, the horse will answer right. *It is never the horse's fault* and if I do good the horse will do good and *if I fail the horse fails*, so if I *get the wrong answer, I asked the question wrong.*

"Make the wrong thing hard and the right thing easy": Horse are comfort seeking animals, they avoid stress, danger and pressure. A horse will avoid conflict and seek comfort. A horse searches for the easy way (we have to make right thing easy). So by making *the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard*, we use the horse's natural instinct to seek comfort and avoid pressure to help the horse find the right answer. A horse only gets release of pressure or comfort when he gives the right answer. By keeping the pressure up, making it hard and making the horse uncomfortable, the horse will keep looking for comfort or release (the right answer) and when he finds it, you release pressure and the horse now knows that is right answer. Which is why you have to know what the right answer is, and you must know that you only release pressure when you get that right answer.

Green on Green equals Black and Blue: A truer saying was never said. This means that when a green rider gets a green horse they will make mistakes, be thrown or hurt and will have many bruises. The term Green means young and inexperience. Now this term is relative since many older riders think they are not green since they rode a horse as a kid. A lot people get back into horses later in life and think they can jump right back in the saddle after 15 or 30 years off. They are wrong and they soon realize the bruises come much easier later in life. A partner of this saying is: *Young troopers need old horses*. This means inexperience riders need an older horse that has lots of experience and has learned many lessons so it will be less likely to hurt an inexperienced rider and less likely to be confused by the inexperienced. Young horses need experienced good riders to the horse can learn the right answers. You would not have a third grader teach other third graders math. If you did, neither would learn, both would make mistakes that neither one would know were mistakes and both would learn wrong things thinking they are right, while all the time neither would know the difference. That is green on green in a nut shell.

A horse does what it does, because you do what you do: *A horse is only a reflection of you and what you do. That is why it can never be the horse's fault. If you do it right, the horse will do it right. If you get the wrong answer you asked the wrong way. If you get better your horse gets better and the horse will do right since you do right. You cause every thing when you handle a horse. You either cause what you want (right) or what you don't want (wrong). Which is why, it is never the horse's fault.*

And last but not least and my personal favorite;

**Think like a Horse:** In order to *think like a horse*, you have to understand how a horse thinks and lives. You have to be able to see the world as a horse sees it, through a horse's eyes, with all their instincts, fear, flight response, their vision, the placement of their eyes for surround vision, what it is like to live as food for others, knowing that their best defense is their speed to flee, understanding their language, their herd behavior and actually being able to know how a horse learns, feels and lives. Only then can you approach things as if you were a horse and only then will you know how not to confuse them, not to judge or blame them and realize that they are *nothing more than a reflection of you and what you do*. Then you can understand why *it is never their fault*, why they know *what is going to happen before it happens*, why *the slow way is the fast way*, why *when you get better your horse gets better* and why the more you *think like a horse*, the more the horse will trust you, see you as a leader and will know that you know.

So if you read, live and breathe these saying, if you understand these sayings, you can apply them to most situations when dealing with horses. You will see crashes, wrecks, horses get hurt and people get hurt all the time and if you critically evaluate the situation and analyze what happened, you can probably apply one or more of these sayings that were not followed. You will see that had people applied these saying and understood them, the wreck could have been avoided.

You will notice that a lot of these sayings connect to each other like a web and all have a common theme. A lot of the sayings are used to describe other sayings. They are all connected and they all put us closer to *thinking like a horse*. And the more we do that, the more we will understand a horse and be able to *listen to the horse*. The more we understand a horse, the more we will communicate with them from their perspective and not ours, the more we will understand why they do what they do and how we can help them. The better we get we can learn from them and we can help them deal with their fears and instincts through mutual understanding and respect. And our journey to higher learning with horses are improved and advanced. So then we *get better* and when that happens - well you know the rest.

Happy Trials,

#### **DANGEROUS Practice with Halters:**

I see for too many horses left in pasture or stall or unattended with their halters on. This is a dangerous and very unsafe practice. Many horses are injured and killed from people doing this. DO NOT leave halters on horses when unattended. A halter will get caught on things and will make the horse think he is trapped, the horse will pull and panic and will band his head, cut his throat, rear, kick and will literally kill himself trying to save himself. Since halters are normally strong to they can hold the horse, the flip side is they do not break easy so a horse can cut himself , choke himself, or pull with such force that when the halter does break, the horse will flip backwards and bank its head possibly causing death or serious injury.

I think the most common reasons for doing is laziness and inability to catch a horse so people become dependant on the halter to catch their horse. Both reasons are wrong and set the horse up to fail and to pay for human laziness or misunderstanding.

Actually by removing and putting on a halter each time you make this routine, you teach the horse that this is normal, you increase your relationship with the horse since you get your horse to accept this and it forces you to spend time on things like getting your horse to lower his head and how to move smoothly around your horse's head and face.

So, like all things with horses, take the time it takes and it will take less time. Remove the halter when you leave your horse. If you see a horse with a halter on in pasture, remove it. If the owner gets mad, tough, the horse has no voice, it is stuck with whoever owns it, so for the horse's sake, remove halters from unattended horses.

## **Moving a Horse from a Bit to Rope Halter or Bit Less Bridle**

**Moving a horse from a bit to bit less:**

**This is really a lot simpler than most think. Like most things with horses it comes down to the person or handler not so much the horse.**

**Like most things with horses, it has to be broken down into small steps. Each step is easy and the horse has to learn and succeed on the small step before moving the next step. That way the horse learns what is going to happen before it happens so you lessen the chance for fear and scaring the horse into a flight or fight response.**

**So, the wrong way to do this is to simply get rid of the bit and try and ride the horse in a rope halter or bit less bridle and then the horse would get confused, scared and would not know what to expect and then would run off or panic and then some stupid human would say the horse is crazy and can't be ridden without a bit or it will run off.**

**The right way is to prepare the horse and to teach yourself how to control the horse with just a rope halter (NO Buckle on lead rope). So you would use a rope halter, THAT FITS, and then work the horse in that halter. By work I mean lunge, allow the horse to drag and step on the rope and to send the horse between things, all teaching the horse to give to pressure and teaching him to work, listen and respond with a rope halter and to teach you how to control and use a rope halter with feel and timing. After the horse and you are good at this part, then move to the next step.**

**So now tie the lead rope in a loop, like reins, so the horse gets used to having the rope around his neck like reins. Then do more ground work, with the reins, have the horse back up using the reins, while you are on the ground, teach the horse to flex on both sides, have the horse give to pressure and move to the left and right with you giving light directions with the reins while you are on the ground. All of this prepares the horse on what to expect when you get on him. The better he knows this the calmer he will be and more he will listen to you and pay attention to you when you get on his back. By making him comfortable with what to expect, you remove fear, uncertainty and confusion, this makes the horse comfortable and more confident. After the horse responds well to this, that means he knows how to do it well and with little or no resistance, then on to the next step.**

**Now, go back, undo the reins and just use the single lead rope. However you are going to use the single lead rope like reins. You are going to lead the horse, back the horse, stop the horse and turn the horse, just like it was a rein, so you will be beside the horse when doing all this. The horse will get confused since he will be used to someone pulling on both reins and bracing his head, which is wrong, but that is what most horses know since that is what most poor riders do. So work with the horse, learn how to use your feel to get the horse to respond to only one rein. Once you do one side then do the other side after you do that then do the opposite sides. So you will be reaching over the horse's back and using one rein on the opposite side and trying to get the horse to stop, back up and turn. All of this will be teaching YOU how to communicate with the horse. After this then you are ready for ONE rein riding.**

**In a small area, round pen preferably, get on the horse with just one rein and allow the horse to figure out how to work on one rein. So you will ride, stop turn and back up horse with one rein. The horse WILL make mistakes, it will get confused, but YOU need to help the horse and learn how to get the horse to understand how to work and listen to ONE rein. After you do this with one rein on one side then put the one rein on the other side and do the same thing. After the horse and YOU get this then ride the horse with one rein and periodically switch from one side to the other. At first you will stop and then move the rein to the other side and then ride and then stop and move back to other side, DO NOT dismount when switching. After YOU get better at switching from one side to the other, then you will switch while riding the horse and not stopping. Then after YOU get better and it is smooth and easy for YOU and the horse, then you are ready for the next step.**

**Now for riding with two reins. Still in the small enclosed area, preferably round pen, tie the lead rope so you have a loop for reins and now ride the horse in STILL USING**

**ONLY ONE REIN**, but now you do not have to switch back and forth and you can turn left and right easier but still only using one rein. After you and the horse are good at this then it is time to move to a little bigger area, but still enclosed, like a arena or paddock or other fenced in area. Do not go from round pen to wide open trail riding, YOU are not ready. Slowly do the same exercises in bigger areas so you and the horse gain confidence.

I did not go over this but after you do walking and turning, then you will do trots, stops and walking and then after that you move to canter, trots and walking. Do not try and teach your horse dead STOPS, go easy and just teach horse to slow and decrease speed from canter to trot to walk to stop, this will get the horse used to giving to just halter pressure and will teach you to use feel and not try and use pain and force like YOU are used to from using a bit all your life.

Then after you do all this over a week or so then you are ready to move on and ride and communicate with your horse without pain or metal in his mouth.

### **Riding Tips:**

[Click Here](#) to see the wrong way to break get on a horse the first time. In this video you will a lady use good pressure and release to get a wild horse follow her and then for some reason gets on the horse, the horse lets her, and then gets bucked off. Now this horse was just taught that it can get rid of a rider by bucking, if it were to ever be trained to ride. The lady is lucky she did not get hurt.

I was asked to add a section about riding to my site. So this is part one. Riding is the art of keeping a horse between you and ground. This is done with some luck, a good seat, balance, good equipment and of course a good Horse (Is there any other kind?). I see riders fall off horses all the time and then hear later that the horse threw the person off. I guess saying you got thrown and blaming the horse is easier than saying, I lost my balance, I was not paying attention, I got too relaxed or just, it was my fault and I fell off. I used to hear expressions about, Riding between the reins and Keeping the horse between your legs, I used to think this was just some clever way that old good riders talked about riding. It wasn't, it was like many things with horses, and you don't really understand it until you experience it.

[Click Here to View a video by Rick Gore about using your legs while riding horses:](#)

I am by no means a perfect rider and there are many out there can make me look like a rookie. However, I can stay in a saddle, I can communicate to a horse, I am said to have a good seat and I have many hours of time in the saddle. Time in the saddle is key, in my opinion, to making you a good rider. If you are a weekend warrior, ride an hour every few days or just on the weekends, then it will take many years for you to really learn to ride. Owning horses and riding horses are a lifestyle and not a hobby. Unless you fully engulf yourself into the equine, you will probably not ever get really good at horses or riding. You may ask, surely not everyone that wins awards and medals spend all their time with a horse or in a saddle. I would say most of them probably do. Can someone learn to ride and become good by just taking lessons, sure? They can learn how the horse was trained, what cues were used to train it and then be taught to give the cues. In this case the horse is carrying the rider. This person will not be able to fix issues, will not able to refine the horse's movement and may never truly understand what it takes from the horse to give them what they are getting.

Ride Time is the key. Some say that only perfect practice is beneficial. I say all practice and contact with horses helps you in some way. Even if you ride badly, spending time in the saddle helps. If you just sit in a saddle it helps. Just getting on and off the saddle, helps get better in the saddle. Each time you spend time in the saddle, you train your balance, you use muscles that increase your balance, you improve your balance, you gain confidence, you feel more comfortable in the saddle and all of this transforms into making you a better rider. Every time you fall off a horse you get better! Yep, just like when you learn to ski, you fall a lot and each time you learn how not to repeat the thing that made you fall last time. Soon you are not falling as much. No difference in riding horses. Experience makes you better, the only way to get experience is to DO IT. You can get some help from a trainer, you can get lots of help from others that don't

know much and you can watch videos until your DVD wears out, but when it comes down to it, Ride Time is the best teacher. But Rick, I am busy, I have a life, I have kids, I have responsibilities, I just don't have the time, bla, bla, bla, either you want it or you don't. It is very frustrating from to see people looking for short cuts with horses, there are not any and every time a person tries the horse pays for it. Spend time with your horse and spend time in the saddle, there is no better way to learn how to ride.

With that said, I will try and give some tips that may help you understand riding a little bit better, but without doing this, practicing this and spending time in the saddle experiencing this, what I say is nothing more than some talk from me. When riding your horse, your goal is to be neutral. Neutral is stay out of the way of the horse. Ride and concentrate on staying out of the way, stay neutral in balance, don't lean, don't lean forward, don't lean back and don't lean to the sides. But Rick, I thought you were supposed to lean back when you stop. That is correct, when you want to send a cue to stop you lean back and or shift your weight back, stopping is not riding. When riding, you stay neutral. If you can't sit on a horse bareback you do not have balance. If you need a mounting block to mount a horse you probably don't have good balance. I do know some old cowboys that have gotten long in tooth and their body is just not able to jump onto a saddle to mount, so they use a block. They still have balance from years of experience of riding. The people I am referring to is the people that are overweight, unfit, lack coordination, don't exercise and have little or no leg muscles. Riding takes balance and the ability to keep your balance while the thing (the horse) is moving under you. By being able to stay neutral in the saddle, you stay out of the horse's way. You allow the horse to carry you with the least amount of effort. You make his job easier and you learn how he moves when you are not in the way. If you don't do this, you are so busy keeping your balance that you confuse the horse, make the horse work harder and make the horse uncomfortable when you are on him. So don't compensate for the horse, don't try and help the horse and don't interfere with the horse. Work on yourself and your horse will get better. If you don't learn how to stay out of the way of the horse you will create future problems, so learn to be neutral, learn to stay out of the horse's way and learn to be balanced in the saddle. You learn this by doing! Ride time!

The more you ride and the more horses you ride, the more you will be able to tell the difference between a horse that can carry himself well and it will help you carry yourself better. At the beginning you will not know the difference. To be well carried by horse is a good feeling. To help a horse you must make yourself a good load and an easy load to carry. You can't do this if you are pulling and using the reins for balance, if you are using the stirrups for balance, if you are hanging onto the saddle for balance. As you get better you will learn to use all things a little and nothing alone! This is really important. The reins alone do not stop a horse, the bit does not stop a horse, your seat position does not stop a horse, your legs do not stop a horse, your voice commands do stop a horse, a fence does not stop a horse, and your whip does not stop a horse. Communication to the horse and the horse wanting to comply stops a horse. Some of these together may work, but in my experience if a horse wants to run more than he wants to stop, he will run. Not because he is mean, not because he is stubborn, not because he is a bad horse, he is just simply a horse. So like balance, not one thing gives it to you. You should use the stirrups lightly, the saddle lightly, your leg muscles, you center of balance, you seat, your head, your shoulders, your back, your position of your arms (not your arms pulling on the reins), your knees acting like shock absorbers, all of this will help give you better balance and help keep you neutral. Using all of these takes time to learn so it becomes natural, until it becomes unconscious, over time you will not have to think about it, it will just happen. But to get you to that point, you need to Do it, you need to spend time in the saddle to learn it and practice it. You need Ride time.

One of the most given piece of advise is "Keep Your Heels Down", this will make you more secure in the saddle, improve your balance and help keep you straight.

Keep your head and shoulders up and sit straight up and down in the saddle. Whenever you get in a jam or feel you are off balance, lean slightly back and this will help get your balance back. These things put you in a secure position for riding.

Anyone can stand around and say Keep your heels down, Sit up straight, Don't look down, Relax your back, Use your legs, Look where you are going, Use your seat, Don't lean, Keep your hands still, Stop pulling on the reins, Relax, don't bounce in the saddle,

Move with your horse, Find your rhythm, Keep your hands soft, Get off the bit, Get on the bit, Stop picking at your horse, Feel your horse's beat, so if you are trying to think about this, you are not riding. Most will tell you that you should have a straight line from your ear, shoulder, hip and ankles. If you have to think about this it is hard to make it happen, it will happen when you are not thinking about it, if you ride enough to feel it, to learn it, to feel how it does not feel right when you don't do it. All of this may help, but you have to experience it to recognize the significance of it. You need to learn this by doing it. Ride time!

I mentioned shock absorbers earlier. This is muscles working and it takes training and strength. Your shoulders cannot help you stay in the saddle, per say. Your seat is made soft and secure by being relaxed and not tense. Your feet and ankles, your knees, and your legs and hips all working together can help reduce movement and absorb shock. So by using your ankles, knees and hips, you control your bounce up and down and forward and back. You use these to stop some movement and then to create other movement (impulsion). By using these correctly you help the horse carry you and make yourself appear lighter and easier to carry. You use these to stop your shoulders and arms from bouncing up and down and all around. Just like a horse running on the wrong lead, it is hard on the horse, you bouncing in the saddle because you don't know how to use your body and balance is hard on you and hard on the horse. By not using your shock absorbers correctly you harden the jars and blows to the horse's back and your back. The horse pays for his mistakes and pays for your mistakes and then pays again when he is blamed for both.

I hear lots of people tell people to use their legs. If you don't have balance, if you don't know how to control your reins softly, if you don't have much ride time, then trying to use your legs is just one more thing to confuse you and the horse. Legs help communicate with the horse, but it has to be done without throwing you off balance, without you getting confused and having to think about it. When you try to do too much, you make the situation worse and you confuse the horse. I can not help a person round pen a horse if they don't know how to lead a horse. I can not help a person use their legs if they don't have balance and rein control. I can't teach rein control if the person has not got balance down. Legs are additional cues to the horse, but if your horse is confused with your lack of balance and your lack of consistency of rein usage, confusing him more with legs will only make it worse.

I say this a lot, 80% of all horse owners are women, and 75% of new horse owners get OUT of horses in the first year. New horse owners want to get a baby (a young untrained horse), want to teach it themselves, want to learn with the horse, all BAD! Green riders with green horses = hurt riders and people getting out of horses. It is a bad combo and no matter how much you tell someone this, they all know they are different and they can do it and they can make it work, it won't happen to them, and they will be careful, they know the risk.. And they get hurt and get out of horses and the horse gets blamed. The statistics are out there, they grow every year and if you go to any clinic you will see bright eyed women with their dream of owning and training their own horse coming true. Then go to any barn and you will see women getting dragged, thrown, with slings on, wearing helmets to keep them safe and riding with fear and insecurity. They will ride in enclosed areas where it is safe and making their horse arena sour, barn sour, or other names they want to pin on a horse. This is done by men too, it is just now predominately women who own most horses. Had I been writing this 25 years ago, I would be talking about men beating and abusing horses to get them to listen and blaming the horse and when they got hurt I would be saying good for the horse. When someone gets hurt trying, it is sad and unfortunate, but when someone gets hurt being brutal to a horse, I say, good for the horse.

I love horses, but they are freaking DANGEROUS. Don't underestimate the gravity of this statement. They will kill themselves if they are scared and trapped, if they think they can get away. It is their nature. So people want to wear a plastic helmet and feel safe. A helmet will not stop your neck or back from getting broke. It will not stop you from breaking a hip or leg. It will not help keep you stay in the saddle or stop your from being dragged with a foot in the stirrup when you fall off. A helmet gives a "false sense of security" and causes people to do things they would not normally do without a helmet, because they FEEL safe. This is bad when it comes to horses. A horse does not care if your head is protected or if you ride him in a Styrofoam body suit. If he gets nervous, scared or feels you are not in control and you are putting his safety in

jeopardy, he will take charge and react. And when he does it will be with extreme force and strength and you and your safety will be of no consideration to him. But Rick, I have heard lots of stories where a horse has saved a person and protected a fallen rider. It is the rare exception and people want to see things in their own way and it may be different than it actually happened. I can bring a horse a carrot and hay every day and the horse will be happy to see me and allow me to feed him, but let me try and get this horse to move or put this horse in a fear situation and I assure you, the last thing in this horse's mind is that I have given him carrots and feed for many days. As the horse threw his rider into a tree or barbed wire fence, the rider thinks, why would you do this, I treat you so good, the horse thinks I can run faster and save myself now with less weight.

So why do I talk about dangerous horses when I am talking about riding. They are so connected it is ridiculous to talk about one without the other. Riding a horse is dangerous, this is why it is probably so fulfilling and gives such a joy and a sense of wholeness. Joining with a horse is something special. It is risky and does not come cheap or without time and sacrifice. The problem is being human; we want things now, fast and without sacrifice. Well, I think you can either sacrifice now and learn to ride and understand the horse, or you can sacrifice later and get hurt, maimed or killed by taking short cuts. If you take the time it takes, it takes less time. The slow way is the fast way with horses. Ride time is the best teacher for learning to ride and the horse is best teacher of the horse.

If I said it once, I say it a thousand times, ride your horse, spend time with your horse and learn about the horse. Knowledge about the horse is the best gift you can give to your horse, second only to time. If you spend enough time, knowledge will come and the horse will teach you. You have to be willing to listen. "A good horseman can hear his horse talk, a great horseman can hear his horse whisper and a bad horseman can't hear his horse if it screams!" Watch, listen and learn, the horse has much to teach.

Now that I may have scared the hell out of you, that was not my intent. By being aware I try and make you learn in a "**Conscious Incompetence**" level. When most people accidents happen (not horse accidents), it is normally because people are in "**Unconscious Incompetence**" mode. In order to learn you must be willing to admit you do not know it all and that you know and understand the importance of knowing. By making you aware of the dangers, I make you aware of the importance of learning and understanding a horse's fear, so you are better able to deal with it when it happens. **WHEN** it happens, not if, because it will. Those who think their horse is trained, "Dead Broke", or "Bomb Proof" are nothing more than an accident looking for a place to happen. All horses get scared, all horses spook and all horses run. If there are any absolutes in horses, those would be it. Knowing this, understanding this, being prepared to deal with this and dealing with it (experience) will help keep you and your horse safe.

Riding with Good Hands: This comprises many things. Being soft is most important, giving slack frequently back to the horse, communication takes feel through the reins, lightly moving in an a slight irritating fashion as to get the horse to listen, pay attention and respond. Less is more, give and hold not pull and yank. Be firm on the reins without being rough or hard. Quiet hands will show in a quiet head. Working and holding reins means always having the ability to change and adjust to the moment of the horse. You must be flexible but consistent. You must be aware and on the ball so you can immediately give direction or assistance if you feel your horse becoming confused, lost or distracted. Like most things with horses you must be patient when your horse gets confused or is slow to respond to your cues. This is where timing comes into play. Timing is knowing when to do something as to enhance your horse's chances of success and not to impede his progress. Anyone can know how to do something or what they should do, but knowing when to do and for how long is extremely important and difficult.

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#### **Mythbusting Crazy Horse Myths**

Be aware of those "life-long horse owners" that tell of these Myths. People passing on these are fakes. They want to appear to know it all about horses and want to impress

those that don't know any better with this mythical knowledge of secrets and mystical wisdom. By educating yourself and questioning everything you hear will make you a better horseman and will prevent these falsehoods from getting passed on and repeated.

Honking noise is caused by dirty sheath - it is not - I explain this on my horseman tips page, it is caused by many things, none of which is a dirty sheath. If you understand a horse you will know the reason a honks or makes noise from his sheath area.

A Mare runs the herd and is in charge of the herd -- Not true, in a wild herd the stallion is the unequivocal leader and is in charge of the herd, he goes where he wants, he eats what he wants and does not yield to any other horse in his herd.

Never let a horse put their butt to you or they will kick - this a common belief by people that do not understand a horse and are afraid of horse - it is not true. A horse may put their butt to you for many reasons such as walking away, wanting a scratch, a mare in heat, to look at possible danger. Those who are scared or nervous and do not trust their horse will say this so they do not need to deal with their fear and it goes back to the old saying: *"To err is human, to blame the horse is even more human."*

When a horse pins his ears they will bite you - horse's pin their ears for many reasons, pain, discomfort, warning, dominance, direction, wind, rain and other reasons. Again this is promoted by those who are scared, insecure and need a reason to justify their fear of their horse. See, if this myth is true, then people being scared of horses are smart. And we all know that "know-it-all" barn people are smart.

The position of a horse's ears can tell you if the horse is safe or dangerous - absolutely not true and is a common myth among old horsemen. This myth, like many got started by people blaming horses for being a certain way, so connecting it to ear position, swirl position, color, head size, breed, bloodlines or any number of other foolish reasons to blame a horse for behavior that was caused by poor horsemen.

A white hoof is softer and not as sound as a dark hoof - scientifically proven to be untrue and incorrect, color horse hooves is nothing more than color pigmentation and has nothing to do with strength of the hoof. Probably started by poor blacksmith's that screwed up feet or by people that neglected the feet of their horse and since the feet were not dark they blamed their neglect on the color of the hoof.

By reading position and direction of swirls and whorls on a horse, you can tell things like disposition and behavior or how good the horse is - fools believe this and is nothing more than horsy racism - a horse is a reaction or reflection of his surrounding and handling, a horse is just a horse, we humans apply good and bad terms to their behavior. I did a video on this topic on YouTube.

If a horse puts his butt to you in a round pen, the horse is being disrespectful - untrue a horse will turn both ways in a round pen (butt away and butt to you, also called inside or outside turns) and it is all dependant on who is rounding penning and what they do to cause the turn. If you believe this foolish theory then a horse can only ever turn one way in a round pen. Which many believe and still do today. Watch any person today round penning a horse, they will get mad, blame, yell or correct a horse for this, since they do know and only going by what they heard from the "life long horse owners".

If a gelding or stallion drops his penis he is being disrespectful, rude and dominant - untrue a horse will drop for many reasons, relaxed, drugged, excited, to pee, from pain or irritation - again this myth is passed on by those that do not understand a horse but feel the need to connect natural behavior to some negative label.

Apple seeds are poisonous to Horses - In large quantities they can be harmful but so can just about any other feed given to a horse. It would take a cup of just pure apple seeds to be toxic for a human, so it would take a lot more to hurt a horse. So unless you are feeding just apple seeds, the seeds of apples are fine and 6 or 10 apples a day is not going to hurt a horse at all. I think it would take a entire tree of apples in order to get over a cup of seeds so this myth or rumor is not true, unless you are feeding your horse handfuls of pure apple seeds.

If a horse drops grain while eating then his teeth need floating - another lack of

understanding myth - a horse is designed to eat grass, they do not eat grain in the wild, they hold their head down when eating and they do NOT chew with their mouth closed - that is why grain and other food falls out of the mouth sometime. But if some "life-long" horse owner see this, has the teeth checked and the teeth need floating, then that must be why the grain fell out. Again there is this need for lots of horse people to show how much they know and continue to pass on foolish myths. Another old saying: "A shallow brook is nosiest".

A horse needs horse shoes to be ridden - untrue, shoes are bad for horses, they cause pain, the nails compromise the hoof wall and the pounding of steel on the hoof is like running a horse on concrete - it causes long term arthritis, joint damage and bone pain - shoes are used by people that want to be lazy and not aware of how and where they ride their horse and think a shoe will protect the hoof, it does the opposite, see my horse hoof page where I explain this in more detail.

If your horse licks dirt he is sick - Not true. Many horses lick dirt to supplement their diet. Some say it a horse does it they are lacking trace minerals in their diet. I have salt blocks, mineral blocks and feed a variety of hay, including some alfalfa and my Mustang still licks dirt sometime.

If a horse paws at the ground or water they are going to lie down - pawing is a natural behavior and it can be done for many reasons, such as playing, showing dominance, splashing, mixing up minerals, to cool off, to test the footing, to threaten and other reasons - another myth started by someone too stupid to know the difference and since they let their horse lay down with them when they pawed, now in order to make this a horse issue and not a stupid human issue, another stupid horse myth is started and passed on.

If a horse rubs his head on you the horse is being disrespectful - dumb, this is passed on by those people that are scared of horses and don't understand them - a horse rubs for many reasons, he could have an itch, he could have something in his ear or eye, he could be just showing affection, grooming loose hair, getting sweat off him and showing acceptance of you as his friend. But if you buy into this crazy neurotic "Respect my Space" crap that dominates the horse world nowadays, then you have to label this behavior as bad to justify your fear of letting your horse get close to you. Just another people problem that is blamed on a horse.

If a horse stops to poop when you are riding, he is disrespecting you - horses stop to poop all the time, they do not like to poop on their back legs, no more than they like to lay down in poop in the pasture - they only do this nasty and dirty habit when locked up by protecting caring owners that don't understand horses. Of course ignorant judges at most horse shows take points off if a horse stops to poop and call it bad, so people wanting to win ribbons pass this stupid myth on. And since everyone repeats it, it must be true.

A horse can't run when it is eating or has food in his mouth - not sure how this crazy crap got started but very easy to prove wrong, go scare your horse when he is eating and see it stands still with food in his mouth or if he runs off.

I hope you see a trend here in all these "horse myths". They are started and carried on by those that do not know. They are mostly fear or ignorance related and then repeated by many who are scared or ignorant. Any blame, name calling or labeling of horses for foolish things like color, ear position, swirl position, is just "horsy racism". It is an unjustified belief based on fear, rumors or lack of understanding. Do yourself and your horse a favor. Believe nothing of what you hear - take responsibility and learn, read, study and become knowledgeable of the horse, so you do not get suckered into the crazy world of "Horse Myths, Horse Secrets or Horse Whisperers".

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[Picking A Trainer](#)

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I have wanted to do an article on this for some time since now. It is too bad, but it seems there are so many shysters, unethical horse trainers and just plain old rip off specialist out there in the horse world. I see many more horse traders that pass themselves off as trainers, than I see good honest horse people that truly have the horse's best interest in mind. Since the beginning of man, it seems they have always found ways to use the horse to make money. Not much as changed over the years.

I worked with a horse the other day that was sent off to a trainer for seven months. Let me say that again, seven months with a trainer. After seven months of training, this horse could not be caught, could not be lead, could not lunge and was fearful of every thing. This is just a shame for the horse and owner. The owner paid good money for help and thought she was getting her horse trained for seven months. This so-called trainer was leading the horse around by tying it to a quad and dragging it, this was her idea of teaching the horse to lead. Did I mention that this horse did not have his feet trimmed for the seven months it was at training? Why, they could not get the horse to hold up his feet for the Farrier. If I said it once, I have said it a hundred times, just because someone calls themselves a trainer, it does not make it so. When talking to the owner of this horse, I was told that when she wanted to go watch her horse and visit and the trainer told her she had to call first before coming out. This is a big red flag. I will list a few red flags you should watch for when picking a trainer.

#### Red Flags to watch for from Trainers:

If you are told to call before you come to visit

I train at varied hours, so I can't give you a specific time I work with your horse

I always wear spurs, but I don't use them

I don't like or buy into that natural horsemanship crap

I don't want you and anyone else working with the horse while I am training it

I need to have time alone with your horse

I need a minimum of 60 or 90 days to fix this horse

The trainer never ask what you plan to use the horse for

The trainer tells you what he is going to do and will not modify for your needs

The trainer can't handle your horse any better than you can, on the first day

Your trainer should tell you, and if not you need to ask, what will my horse be able to do when you are done. If you get some mumbo jumbo about it depends on the horse, some horses learn faster, I don't like to rush the horse or my favorite, they get offended and tell you that you will get your 30 days of training then we will where the horse is after that. If this trainer is reputable, honest and trust worthy, they will tell you a list of things you can expect and if it takes longer then they will not charge you for the additional time. Your trainer should tell you your horse will be able to do one, two and three when you get it back.

Things you need to make sure and tell your trainer before you hire or pay them.

I need to know when you work with my horse so I can watch and ask questions

I need to have full access to my horse while in training

I don't want spurs worn or used when I horse is in training

I don't want any bits other than a snaffle (or bit that you intent to ride) used on my horse

I don't want a stud chain used on my horse

I don't want my horse dragged or led by any vehicles

I want my horse to be able to do 1, 2 and 3 when I get it back

A good litmus test when picking a trainer is does this trainer own horses? Can you ride his/her horses? If these answers are no, I would not think this person is much of a trainer for you. You would not take your car to an unlicensed guy, who works in an alley, that does not own any cars and then he tells you he only takes cash and you can't watch him work on your car. I would call this a clue. If your trainer can't immediately handle your horse better than you, then I would be suspicious. A good horse person can make a horse look worse and more difficult to try and convince that you need to hire them, so be aware.

You need to get weekly updates from you trainer. Like a report card, what your horse has learned, what issues your horse has, what are the strengths and weaknesses of

your horse and any injuries or problems.

If your horse is sent away to another location, you need to ensure shots and feet care are kept up to date and your schedule is followed. Have goals defined on what you want from your horse. I want to lead him, ride him on trails, have my inexperienced child ride him and be able to pick up his feet. If you want these things and your trainer trains your horse to slide stop and spin in an arena that will not work for you. If I want to trail ride my horse, I don't want a trainer that only works my horse in a round pen or in an enclosed arena. If I want to ride dressage, I don't want some cow cutting horse trainer training my horse on cows. A good trainer should be asking these questions so they know what and how to train your horse.

You have to be actively involved with your trainer and training. You have to know how your horse is being taught, what aids are being used, what leg pressure is being used, how are the reins being used and just general handling of your horse. You need to be able to see how your horse handles pressure, how it deals with fear and too much pressure. By being involved you can ask questions and work on YOUR horsemanship and horse knowledge, so you will be able to continue teaching and growing with your horse.

If a trainer is good and honest he or she will have no problem with any of these requests. They should be encouraging you to be involved and if they are really interested in helping the horse, they will end your horse's training with a few days or week of training with you and your horse. That way you can get immediate feedback on what you are doing wrong or why your horse is doing what it does with you. A trained horse in the hands of an untrained rider is like giving a car to teenager with no license and no driving experience. The car will be fine and knows what to do, but the danger is with the driver. Not a lot of difference with horses. Any good trainer will know this and will not try and sell you on how good a trainer he is or on how good he can make your horse look when he rides it. Any good rider can make a horse look good or better than an inexperienced rider.

A good little trick that some trainers like to do is tell you how bad your horse is and how it may take longer since your horse is so bad. BS is what this is. Any real trainer knows that a horse can be fixed as easy as it can be messed up, with few exceptions. Any person who knows horses will know how to make your horse look worse than it is, cause it to pull, rear, or act out and then convince you that this horse is really difficult. This is nothing more than a set up for extending the horse's training and dragging out the training so you feel you have to keep the horse in training longer. Taking advantage of an inexperienced horse person is not hard. It is really very easy for any horse person to do. It is wrong, unethical and bad for the horse. By taking advantage of inexperienced owners, these trainers set the owner up to get hurt and set the horse up to get blamed. Inexperienced horse owners be warned!

I hear a lot of people who are fearful of their Farriers, Vet and trainers. They are concerned about upsetting them by asking questions, giving instructions or making demands. You pay these people for a service and have a right to request things from them. If anyone of them wants to get upset about your request, then they should be able to explain why they can't do something and why they think it is a bad idea. don't let people you pay for a service dictate how they treat your horse. With that said, you have to be involved in helping your. If you expect your Farrier to teach and train your horse to hold his feet up, that won't work. If you expect your Vet to teach you how to control your horse safely while getting medical attention, that won't work.

So do your homework, pick a trainer with caution and skepticism. Ask lots of questions, stay involved and make some clear goals. If at any time, the hair on the back of your neck stands up, pay attention to this clue. Ask another trainer, do some research on the internet, get a second opinion and confirm things for your self. don't take anything as gospel, just because this person calls himself a Trainer.

### **Riding in the rain helps you and your horse:**

With the rainy season upon us, there will be great opportunities to enjoy a ride in the rain. I often get strange looks when I ride my horses in the rain. Later I hear people

commenting that it is dangerous and my horse could slip and might get hurt or I hear there is no point in doing it, so why would anyone do it? These comments come from people who do not understand or are just unwilling or fearful of doing it, so they try and down play or don't understand the importance of it.

Riding in the rain is so beneficial to you and your horse that it is hard to cover it all in one piece of writing. A ride in the rain teaches trust, confidence and balance to both you and your horse. For your horse, it is harder to balance while carrying you when he has less footing, is sliding or sinking in mud, is trying to determine the depth of water puddles and is dealing with some loss of sight and hearing from the falling rain. With all this going on the horse has to look to you for guidance and support. He looks to his leader for confidence and direction. He has to depend on you more and trust that you will not get him hurt, will not lead him into danger and will keep him safe. The better you do this the more he trusts you and will see you as his unequivocal leader.

You on the other hand get as much as he gets. You learn how to help him and guide him even when you are a little insecure. You have to be much more aware of his capabilities and his strengths and weaknesses. You have to balance more in order to stay out of his way and make it easier for him to carry you, without panicking or pulling on his head or reins. You have to trust his footing and reassure him if he gets nervous or insecure. You learn to control your fear and rely on your horse more. All of this while getting wet, having rain in your eyes and adjusting to the slicker reins and saddle. Your confidence in yourself, your riding ability and your horse grows exponentially. This confidence is passed on to your horse and he grows as well.

But Rick, I have seen horses fall in the mud when it rains, isn't this dangerous? Walking up to a horse is dangerous, picking his feet is dangerous, trying to hold on to a lead rope, getting on a horse's back, running a horse under saddle, jumping a horse, taking a horse to a show, trail riding and just about anything you do with a horse can be dangerous. If you are trying to avoid danger completely, you should not be around horses. I feel safer riding my horse down a slick rock cliff than I do having some people walk their horse near me. I have been hurt and nearly hurt ten times as much by other people's horses and their mistakes, than by my own horses. It is never the horse's fault and the horse always has to pay for their own mistakes, your mistakes and other people mistakes. Try not to get caught up in the fear card played by many people. When people don't know how to do something or lack the ability, knowledge or confidence to do something, they will sometime use fear or it is dangerous to cover up the real reason. Riding a horse in the rain or mud is no more dangerous than many other things done with horses. Like many things YOU need to adjust and learn how to minimize these risks, accept that there are some risks, learn to increase your skills, confidence and know when you are over your head.

So how do you minimize the risk? You slow down, you think more, you concentrate more and you become more aware of your horse. When riding for the first time in the rain or mud, go slow. Take your horse to a place he is familiar with. Walk him and let him explore carrying you and deal with the mud and loss of secure footing. Stay out of his way, work on your balance and allow him to use his mind and body to figure out things, but be ready to provide direction and assistance if he gets scared or lost. Be ready to take him to a slow circle, a nice walk or an easy stop. Learn to give him his head, stay neutral in the saddle and know when to give him help. After showing him he can do it on flat level and familiar ground, then move to a good straight away so you can do a slow controlled trot and a few downward transitions and stops. So trot and slow to a walk, then trot and do a stop. This will all teach the horse how to adjust to the slicker surface and will let him know that he can still stop and turn if he slows down and does not get in a hurry or panic. All of this will be a little scary for both you and your horse, so you both have to depend on each other more. This is where the growth occurs, growth in ability and growth in confidence.

I do all my riding in an arena and never ride in the rain, why do I need to this? If you ever go to a show, a trail ride, a parade, or just get caught in the rain sometime, this will be invaluable to you and your horse. By doing this when you control the situation, you set your horse up for success. If you ever have to do this when you did not plan it or when you get stuck doing it, you set your horse up for failure. Even if you never plan to ride in the rain, this is an invaluable lesson for you and your horse and real chance for growth and trust. It challenges you both, increases the bond and trust and redefines

you as stronger and more confident leader. Of course riding after a good rain will give you most all the benefits as well, but the falling rain really makes the adventure a more rewarding and challenging experience.

So dress warm, try and stay dry, get rid of the umbrella, saddle up and take advantage of a good ride in the rain. It will do you and your horse wonders. And I assure you, after you are done, you will feel closer and see a better bond between you and your horse. Sharing the freedom with our horse, enjoying the journey and growth through understanding all make horse ownership worth it.

### Understanding Horse Fear:

I still see far too many people blaming a horse for their instinctive fear responses. If you think like a horse and see the world as they do, it will help you understand and help them. Imagine if you were put in a cage with lions, bears and tigers roaming free. You know these animals will eat and kill you, but the only place that was safe and could protect you was a steel cage in the middle of all these people eating animals. Would you want to leave this protected cage? If you had to get to this cage, past an open area, can you image the fear you would feel as you ran to the cage trying to beat the many predators around you? Once in this protected cage would you be willing to come out? If someone tied a rope around your neck and pulled you out of this cage past the watching lions, tigers and bears, can even begin to think of the fear you would be experiencing? Welcome to the world of a horse.

The other night I was out in pasture with my horses. It was about 10 PM, a beautiful night with a little rain falling lightly. I decided to bring a flake of hay out to the back of the pasture and let my guys eat next to the side of a hill. It was quite and I was enjoying listening to the horses eat and chew in the quite night. It was very peaceful and relaxing. Then in a second everything changed. As I stood in between my two horses, rubbing them both on their backs, I saw a shadow appear on the hill. I was looking at the stars and my horses were both relaxed, head down and eating some good mixed grass hay. As I saw this shadow, I could not make it out, but knew I saw movement. I also knew that I and my horses were the only ones in the pasture, so I thought. I got focused on the area where I saw something. I forgot about my horses soothing chewing noise and I was not relaxed anymore. My heart rate went up and I was straining to hear and see what I could not. Then I found it. It was a coyote. A very large, not skinny and very healthy coyote. My first thought was Holy shit, it's a coyote. As I watched him, he watched us.

After my initial, "this ain't good" reaction, I started thinking. I though, my horses have not seen this guy yet and when they do, I am screwed since I am in the middle of them. Self survival kicked in. I knew my horses could take this guy out with one kick, but I did not want to be collateral damage in the middle of their reaction. So I slowly and calmly stepped back and moved away from their charge or escape path, as to not get trampled in the reaction I was sure was going to happen. As I moved, I kept my eye on the coyote and he kept his eyes on me. Did I mention that this coyote was only about 10 yards away during this natural encounter?

So after I got to a position where I felt safer (not safe), I started wondering why the horses have not spotted this guy yet. So I checked the wind direction to see if his scent was being blown towards the horses or away from them. Oddly enough, it appeared as if it was being blown towards them. So now I not thinking completely calm but I am wondering if my horses are idiots, are they too engrossed in the good hay to be paying attention or if they were so domesticated that they didn't realize the danger I was seeing. So now about 15 seconds have passed and it seemed a lot longer, yet no reaction from my horses, not even a head raise. I am thoroughly confused now. How can these horses, perfectly designed for survival, not see this clear threat, which I saw over a half of a minute ago?

Then the coyote, decided to get a better look at us and he came a step or two closer, down the hill and towards us. I am thinking, this coyote must be crazy, he sure is bold, maybe he has friends and something bad is about to happen. Then, to my amazement, my Mustang calmly lifted his head half way, pinned his ears and gave that don't come

any closer look. To my surprise the coyote seemed to understand the message. The coyote stopped in his tracks, turned away and went back up the hill. I was in shock, here I was, second guessing these marvelous creatures and the entire time, they knew exactly where the coyote was and what he was doing. As my Mustang told the coyote to leave, my Quarter horse lifted his head slightly, looked at the coyote and calmly looked at the Mustang, as if to say I saw him too and then they both went back to eating. Simply amazing I thought. Once again, I was so caught up in me, thinking I was smarter, I was being so aware, I am the superior being and all the while, they knew. They knew he was there before I saw him, they knew he was not a threat, they watched him as they ate and they knew when to warn him. What a great experience.

I was so proud of them. Here they were, their own little herd, looking out for each other, being alert and aware, knowing how to handle the situation perfectly without panic, running, kicking and just the right amount of action. All of this without my help or interference. Wow, once again I have to remind myself, horses know! They know what is going to happen before it happens. They are more aware than any of us can imagine. They are the ultimate survival animal. They are not mean and do not attack. They only want to be horses and avoid conflict. They know, because their life depends on it.

So after big hugs and favorite scratches for both of them, it was time for me to leave this perfect herd and go back to my reality. Then it hit me. I was never really threatened by the coyote. I knew that my horses could take this guy on with no problem and I felt safe being with them, part of the herd. After the warning given by my Mustang, the coyote did not come any closer, however he did walk around us a few times before wondering off. And when he left he walked the same way I had to walk to get back to the barn. This changed things for me. With the herd I felt safe, now I had to walk back, alone, in a dark pasture, in the same direction that the coyote did, after seeing this rather brave coyote circle us as if he was checking us out and searching for weakness.

As I walked back alone, since my herd was not going to leave their nice hay I had brought them, I felt uneasy and vulnerable. I was walking and looking around quickly. I was not relaxed. I was not paying attention to much of anything, but constantly searching for that rather large coyote. As I got further away from my horses my uneasiness became greater. I took my hat off and waved and swatted at mosquitoes in an attempt to appear bigger and maybe scare the coyote, that I could not see but was sure was out there. Somehow the walk back seemed much longer than the walk out. As I got back to my truck without an encounter (that I knew of, maybe I was being watched) I suddenly got a better understanding of how horses live each moment of their life. Always uneasy, always watching and looking, rarely relaxing for fear they may miss something and always with that fear of being eaten if they drop their guard, fail to pay attention or get into a position where they can't run or defend themselves.

I am sure that everyone reading this at one time or another in their life, they were in a situation where they were scared, fearful and felt uneasy. I hope they can remember this and gain a better understanding of how horses live each day. And maybe the next time their horse pulls, runs away, accidentally steps on them, reacts to a scary sound or the horse eating baby stroller or bicycle, they will have more patience and understanding that the fear to a horse is real, never ending, deeply instinctive and never done to be mean or bad.

Happy trails,

Rick

### **Correction, Respect and Trust:**

It is hard to say without seeing, but head tossing and throwing can be dominate or it can be communicating come, pay attention to me, displaying pride. My Mustang does this to me some time, he still thinks he is a stud and I ignore it if it is not aggressive. He may be telling you that he is not willing to be completely submissive, which is OK, but it also means he is not seeing you as the undisputed leader. If he has not attacked you, not tried to aggressively bite you, has not aggressively backed into you kicking, then he does not think he is leader, but it will take time to get him to completely submit. If you push him away too much he will be confused and never understand the right

answer and will get tired of trying to find the right answer, which will lead to frustration and then maybe resentment. So you have to be reading him all the time and willing to accept small submissions. Move him but release immediately at any sign of submission and let him face you or approach. You say he is rank, I say he has learned this behavior from inconsistent handling and confusion. He just wants to feel comfortable and his body and instincts are telling him to take charge to feel safe, until someone (another horse) shows him they are in charge, they understand him, they will be fair and keep him safe, his instincts will not allow him to relax and give in to this new leader.

You have to read him, pay attention and really back off trying to push him and be weary of him since he is a STUD, a three year old is a young horse, still trying to find his place, I don't think a stud is really a stud until late threes or four or maybe five, treat this horse like a three year old and forget he is a stud and you will project, subconsciously, that you are fearful, over careful, worried, or that you think he is RANK. He is just a horse looking for fair and consistent leadership, guidance and direction, if you make the right answer clear and easy to find, he will come a long way fast.

Studs get this bad reputation for being ohhhhhhh so bad, so they get treated that way and then become that way, it is a vicious cycle for the horse and it is unfair and sets them up for failure.

Be safe, be careful but treat him like a three year old mare and see if he changes, you have to change what you are doing if you want him to change. He sounds smart which is why he is not giving in, he has figured out people fast, so he will be a bigger challenge but will teach you more about a horse than anyone ever could. Learn from him and pay close attention to what he is saying or trying to say and don't be so fast to see him as "the stud".

Rick

----- FOLLOW-UP -----

QUESTION: Thanks for the advice. I really appreciate it. I just want to clarify a few things that I forgot to add. It doesn't bother me that he is a stud I am very comfortable around them. The only time I ever treat them differently is when a mare is around and all I do is keep an eye on him. I was never worried about him being "rank" either until he did bite and strike at me a few times. It seemed as though once he trusted me he started to test me and that's why I have "rank" in quotes. He would try to change directions in the pen without my permission. He would also come running at me to get me to move out of his way. He only recently started this. He never showed any signs previously. I was happy because we were making such good progress and then he pulled the striking and biting incident. It was when I was out in the pasture just hanging out with all my horses. I really like to just sit and watch them. I am also very in tune with him and reward any slight try he makes towards accepting me as his leader. I have only had him a week and in two sessions he would face me and allow me to slowly approach him. By the third session he would put his nose to my hand. Then I migrated to touching his neck. Then I went two days without working with him and then he pulled that incident in the pasture. In those few lessons though he went from being a very stand offish nervous horse to more trusting. He was actually the first one up to me when I called to my horses. I know he's young and he loves to play with his other pals and was wondering if he was just trying to play with me too. It seemed as though he almost had a spark in his eye when he did that. I didn't aggressively move him either just twirled my lead rope at him and he faced me, and I rubbed him. I was just curious as to why he would display that behavior. Thank you for your response.

Answer: Well not sure why he did it but it was definitely a challenge to your leadership role and an attempt to push you and move your feet to show his dominance. I would let him know that upset me and get pretty aggressive in my response and make him think, "I don't want to try that again", "I know that is a wrong response"...

I hear the word trust a lot and not all, but a lot of people (mostly women since 80% of horses owners are women) think if a horse lets you pet him or does not try and kill you they trust you. I disagree with this, a horse will only trust you if they respect you and you trust them, not respect like stay of my face and respect my space... respect like I know you are leader, I do not test you very much, I never try and threaten you, I do not

ever try and bite you or kick you, I know you will win if I try and fight or push you... that is respect and that is trust for a horse. Don't get me wrong, I love my horses, I hug and kiss them, give them carrots from my mouth, but if they show any aggression, they know s\*\*t will hit the fan. To me that is clear, no confusion, no if's, and's butts or coconuts.. With that said, once I make my point very clear, I move on and forget it, I correct just like a lead horse, I will kick you hard and make it hurt, but then I go back to grazing... Where people miss this is they want to work up slow to a correction, tap, ask, beg, try, do little hits, little rope swings, lots of threats and then it just escalates and what they are really doing is desensitizing the horse to them and their corrections. Then the horse does not respect and thinks he is being harassed and picked on and get confused and never knows CLEARLY what the right answer is. Get in and get out, correct hard fast and clear and move on, don't treat a horse like a kid, with threats of dad coming home, with threats of time-outs, with a bunch of words that mean nothing, correct him fast, show him the right answer and release fast and move on. This is very important and most horse owners never get it. So the horse is always testing and they are always fighting and their is a constant yo yo effect in the relationship since the horse is never clear.

This guy may be wanting to play with you which means he sees you as a herd member (good), even lower horses (geldings) will try and play with the leader to learn and grow, some time the leader will indulge this and other times the leader will say no. Most people always say no since they are afraid the horse will lose respect or hurt them, I think it comes down to confidence and knowledge and the ability to read a horse so you know where and when to draw the line. Since most don't know where they use stud chains, keep the horse at a distance, never trust the horse and are deep down scared of the horse... the horse knows this and there is not relationship or trust there. If you want a horse to trust you, you have to trust your horse.... another misunderstood and missed area of horsemanship.

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A wise man speaks because he has something to say - a fool speaks because he has to say something. --- A bumblebee is faster than a tractor. --- Don't sell your horse to buy a plow.

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