

Opening reminders:

1. In natural horsemanship, we apply prey animal psychology as we serve as benevolent "herd leader" to our horse. As it is natural for the horse to remain highly perceptive to us as their leader, whenever we might suddenly sense, fear or even dread something, the horse is generally going to pick up on our feelings instantly. There is a simple way around that problem: focus your mind and thoughts only on what you *want* the horse to do, not what you *fear* the horse will do, and the result will be much better.

2. Successful training and riding requires realizing / recognizing that a horse must want to work for us in order to perform its best. When this desire is carefully cultivated will they go about their work in more than just a mechanistic obedient manner. Only by taking the time to learn your horse's language - how they communicate with other horses and with you – will you generate a level of trust in the relationship and enhance mutual progress.

3. We need to remember the importance of recognizing our horse's response, no matter the quality, to any request we make. If we give a cue and the horse responds, at any level, and we do not let the horse know that we recognized their response or effort at a response, then the cooperation will erode as the two way communication is lost.

“Points of Interest”

1. **Rider Confidence:** As a young man, a famous American Country singer and guitarist Roy Clark was an accomplished rider. However, he had a bad accident when a horse reared and fell on him, crushing his leg. It took eleven months for his recovery, costing him his confidence and he stayed away from horses for a long while. Then he went to a friend's ranch and his friend put him on the ground with a colt in a round corral / pen and when the colt approached him he had a panic attack and couldn't wait to get away. It took another year of mental exercises, visualization and riding practice for Roy to overcome his equiphobia, but he did it and rode well again as well as becoming a respected breeder of Quarter Horses and winning Thoroughbreds. If you have lost your confidence, take heart as I spend over 50% of my time helping riders (as well as horses) regain and build their confidence. It is more than just a possibility to achieve.

2. **Mabel Todd** was a physical therapist whose pioneering work greatly affected the course of riding in the twentieth century. In 1921 Mabel, living in Boston, began working with an eight year old girl who was afflicted with curvature of the spine. She gave the girl exercises and new ways of looking at her body using mental imagery. All which was way before its time. She encouraged the girl to ride and in spite of her handicap, the girl excelled. The little girl later incorporated much of Mabel Todd's work and teachings into an innovative riding approach that she dubbed “**Centered Riding**” which is a standard today. That little girl, now in her 90's, is “**Sally Swift**” and is still quick to credit her teacher.

Riding & Training Advice:

1. Regarding the average number of repetitions required for changing a habit: a human requires an average of up to 200 repetitions in order to CHANGE a habit from an old one to a new one; therefore the average of 60 repetitions that a horse requires to accomplish a change of habit, is not all that many repetitions in the scheme of things.

2. Improving stops: We can greatly improve both our horses stops as well as their overall attention to us mentally by moving our weight onto our pelvis and using our half halts “with an immediate release”

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(Better stops, control and awareness)

of pressure” in order to teach our horse to “stop on the release” rather than the hold. The stops and communication can be further improved by reining back a step or two every time our horse fails to stop as quickly as we wish. It then begins to anticipate the possibility of our requiring a rein back. Additionally by moving our pelvis under us, sitting on our pockets and/or moving our feet forward slightly, we help cue our horse as they can feel the slight weight changes. Furthermore by lowering our energy levels and exhaling forcefully the horse is provided with further natural cues. It is a good practice to work on stopping without use of the reins at all via these body movements / cues and using our mental focus. It is a great feeling to know our horse is so attuned to our thoughts once this is achieved. Riders seldom fail to break into a smile when this is done.

3. It never pays to constrain or restrict a horse; especially when it is excited or frightened as that only serves to push them farther into their right brain / instinctive flight mode. A much better and effective solution is to redirect their energies and direction of travel via single rein controls and using pressure release (whether riding or on the ground). Additionally the horse can see us once its head is turned a bit and that herd mentality helps considerably.

4. Being stuck on a runaway horse is the biggest fear of most riders. The single-rein control and stop can change all that. To accomplish the single-rein control / stop, the rider pulls on one rein instead of two and in as much of an outward direction as possible (using pressure - release). This gradually bends the horse's head and neck to one side, making it easier for the rider to redirect the horses forward motion and eventually as the turn is tightened it becomes possible to disengage the hind quarters and generate a stop without ever pulling straight back on the reins and bit which only serves to generate more claustrophobic fear in the horse. For the rider, this is not a particularly difficult maneuver, as the horse has relatively little strength in his neck to oppose lateral movement. But the true magic occurs when the horse is conditioned to this cue ahead of time. A conditioned response is an involuntary response. It's working on the subconscious mind that overrules the conscious mind. So even though the horse wants to run straight away, if you have trained and established as a conditioned response that, when this horse feels this pressure, he's going to bend his head laterally eventually all the way around. As he's slowing down, the horse will veer off to one side, so be sure you allow space for that. A “cavalry lift” can serve to relax a stiff neck as well.

Closing reminders:

1. Anytime we are in the presence of or riding our horses, we are training them in some way. This is true whether or not we are consciously or inadvertently training them. We need to be more aware of our actions when we are in the company of our horses.

3. One of the key things you must keep in mind whilst teaching your horse is that they won't always “get it right away”. Our job is to keep explaining what we want in a kind, patient, clear and sometimes firm but benevolent manner.

2. Bits made of materials that contains nickel / chrome tend to generate electrolysis and can irritate a horse's mouth, causing excess salivation. There are metals that do not cause this problem, such as brass, copper, sweet iron, plastic or coatings with inert substances. We should try to keep our horses comfortable, especially if we want their focus on us.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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