

Riding & Training Perspectives

REMINDERS:

Voice Commands must tie to or coincide with tactile commands, signals, and instructions. The most basic reason for this is when your horse cannot hear your voice over wind noise, traffic noise or any other loud noises. There must be a tactile instruction that the horse can understand or they can become confused / worried. All good circus animal trainers can tell you voice commands are effective, when and only when they can be heard by the animal. Horses and other animals may not precisely understand the actual words we use but there is no denying that they do understand intensity, inflection, tones, etc.. They can associate all those things with our requests and even with our demands if we unwisely choose to act in such a manner.

KNAPING AND SHYING:

Whenever your horse knaps or shies it is generally a mistake to try to redirect the direction the horse is trying to move by turning the head away from that direction. It is always much to time consuming to accomplish, even if we are strong enough to do so. A much better method, which is much quicker in our response, is use single rein pressure to initially carry on in the direction the horse knaps, i.e. in the direction the horse is pointing his face and then carry on beyond the direction in which the horse actually wanted to go, by carrying on past it and on to a direction that we have chosen. This also is applicable when a horse shies, as we can use single rein pressure to initially carry on in the direction the horse's face is looking / pointing and then continue on past the point of worry and on to a direction we choose. Basically to make our idea initially coincide with theirs and then take over control of where their feet are moving.

MORE REGARDING FOALS:

Foals will usually give us the opportunity of teaching them that they cannot always get their way. We aren't capable of acting as their mothers nor as other senior horses do in order to reprimand them, such as kicking or biting them. However if we can learn to recognize these opportunities and use them by showing the foal (and this also applies to grown horses) that a particular undesirable action will bring about action (not reprimands) from us that is undesirable to them. This means actions such as hard work - such as backing them up or using pressure to move their feet around. Work is much better than reprimands as reprimands can become games to them. Use the age old methods of reverse psychology. Acting as if you believe the foal has asked you to react in the work ways.

“Imprinting” is also something to be careful with. There is a lot of controversy on this subject, however over 70% of all trainers polled in the United States came up with the same or similar recommendations I will provide here. Imprinting can be detrimental as it can turn the foal into a horse that becomes belligerent, disrespectful towards humans and difficult to train. If you plan to train your foal to become a performance horse, then imprinting can actually hurt it's chances. Horses make poor pets especially when they

begin to think of us as playmates. It can become downright dangerous if we don't make them aware of their limitations with regard to "our space".

Here are a few suggestions for successfully dealing with foals:

Firstly, let the foal be a horse as opposed to being treated like another human or as a pet. Otherwise it is a recipe for trouble as any horse needs to know he is a horse in order to be mentally and emotionally balanced. Handle the foal like a horse, using "horse" psychology and communication - NOT "human". When a mare is in process of giving birth, don't mess with her or the foal until they have strongly bonded as mother and baby. This is one of the more controversial points. However, intervening too early has proven many times to lead to problems. It is a better idea to wait at least one day after birth before doing much with the baby. One day is not a long time. After a day, you can introduce yourself to the foal and do whatever you wish with the foal. Always keep in mind though, that this cute little baby is still a horse and should be treated like a horse. The baby needs to learn that you are his "leader" and not his "playmate". It is good to teach the foal that you are there to care for him and protect him but that you also expect him to behave in a certain way.

All horses need to know that when a human is handling them, there are rules, boundaries and limitations. Horses actually EXPECT and NEED this guidance.

A foal's mother sets rules when she is interacting with him so foals actually expect you to set rules when you are interacting with him. If you fail to do this, you will very likely be creating a juvenile delinquent that is disrespectful and pushes you around.

Generally, by the time the baby is a yearling, you should have taught him to lead well and stand well / still when tied to be groomed. They should know how to be longed on a longe-line. I recommend the method I have previously explained where no pressure is put behind the foal, i.e. only from the girth area forward. They should be good about having their feet trimmed, etc.. When it becomes time to start the colt or filly under saddle as a 2 year old, things will go much better if they trust people and are not afraid of humans. Sending a colt / filly that is afraid of people to a professional trainer, will be more stressful to the colt / filly and it will take the trainer more time to get him / her started.

I have been hired by some more enlightened stud farms such as Chadwell Stud in Essex to help in creating /training better foundations and two way communications with their foals and yearlings and sometimes older horses, so that when they need to be sent out to other trainers or sold on at sales they fare much better and experience much less stress.

A CLOSING REMINDER: Whilst riding out, try keeping your horse "mentally connected to you" as much as possible. Keep up communications and periodically remind them of our leadership by giving them things to do under your firm, albeit benevolent guidance.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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