

Communication and Understanding

Each month I will be writing on subjects that I deal with and teach regularly in my training work with horses and their owners/riders.

This month I will be addressing an age old difficulty and problem, that is of communication and understanding between species, obviously between equine and human. Next month I will continue this subject in greater detail on how to deal with various problems in communication and understanding.

Generally all horse people wish to have or establish a good relationship with our horses. As we are the ones that have gotten into their lives and not the other way round, it is incumbent upon us to learn ways to better communicate with and understand the horse. We need to learn to better recognize their responses and reactions and how to best deal with them. We also need to learn how to recognize and deal with their many manipulations.

An important point about this desire is that it is not a task that once accomplished ,to any particularly desired degree, can be taken for granted without constant maintenance. It is something we must attend to each and every time we are around our horses, just as horses do in herd situations where every day they must reestablish their hierarchy or what we tend to call the pecking order.

Communication is a two way street where the horse must believe we are paying attention to him and his responses to our requests/instructions in return for his paying attention to us – we must recognize his tries. He will test this premise from time to time before truly believing in our intent.

We need to study and learn the mechanics and nature of the horse for, as Predators, we are so very much different to the Horse, a Prey animal. We can easily cut off effective communications by inadvertently acting to much as predators and causing our horse to go into his, what is now-a-days commonly known as “Right Brained” or Instinctive side. Any learning & communication we need comes from their “Left brain” or the pragmatic side of their thinking processes.

Communication with horses consists of Body language, ocular focus (our eyes), mental focus and intent, our breathing, our voice tones and more.

When we are training our horses from the ground we need to pay attention to their responses and replies to our requests and instructions, as this sets up a two way communication between us. This also applies to when we are riding, whether training or just riding for pleasure, as paying attention to their replies and responses to our Aids (or Cues) again sets up a two way communication.

In the beginning of any training, a horse does not see the reason, meaning or purpose in what we are asking. However, through persistent and methodical repetition, the horse learns what we want as well as the appropriate aids/cues which apply.

A horse's first and foremost preoccupation is for survival, being a prey animal and for 45 million years they have been very successful, so it works well for them and we will never change their instinctive minds on that score. Therefore, we must learn to deal with our overtly predator actions or we will fail in successful two way communication. We must endeavor not to push them into "right brained" instinctive reactions or we loose/block cogent communication.

We often misunderstand our horse's actions and believe they have acted in a belligerent, disrespectful or stubborn way, when in reality it is generally a reaction based in fear or lack of confidence due to the horse's misunderstanding. We then tend to react improperly and actually create an even larger problem. There are a number of effective ways of dealing with such confusion/fear that do not illicit right brain behavior. We must learn these mechanics so that we may react instinctively in ways that are appropriate to the situation. I spend great deal of my time teaching such reaction and control measures.

Horses are generally not disrespectful, as we often tend to believe. They are simply doing what they know and what they have been trained to do, whether it was intentional or unintentional training. We need to recognize that each and every time we are around a horse we are teaching them something, whether it is what we desire or not.

We also make the common communication mistake of asking our horse to take various actions at times that the horse cannot physically accomplish that action. We then tend to get short tempered for their delays in acting timely or in error. We must learn when to give certain aids/cues so that the horse can actually succeed. One clear example, that I see often, is when a rider asks for a specific canter departure lead at an instant that the horse cannot achieve it physically.

When communicating with horses it pays dividends to be non confrontational and to make sure you have the horse's attention before increasing pressures via cues/aids, etc.

I have found, over the last 500 training sessions here in the UK, that I spend large amounts of my time teaching owners/riders how to deal with two way communications as well as safety control measures, for frightened and/or confused horses. I have come to appreciate the growing numbers of UK folks who are truly and sincerely attempting to learn and apply better ways of dealing with their horses. I have gotten wonderful results from contentious riders / owners who apply the exercises I give them to continue with long after I am gone, which

produces results that are amazing. This can be seen from endorsements on my site. All horses benefit from foundation work throughout their entire lives.

A point for communicating with humans here in the UK (being a Texan) : **“Make sure your AIDS are in the correct position before giving your CUES”**

Next month I will expand on various points made in this month’s article and over the coming months I will write more on Communication and Understanding, as well as on Equine Nature, Training Attitudes and Application, Equine Stoicism (understanding it and maintenance of the horse’s capacity), Security (both equine & human) and Passive / Benevolent Leadership, Control and/or Directing Energy in lieu of blocking it and more.

Have fun and stay safe.....Lewis Blackburn

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