

# What is "Training for Courage"?

I have been training horses of different breeds for many years. Even though I have trained many a challenging horse, this has paled compared to the challenge of educating the owners.

To be effective, everyone who owns a horse must understand some basic training principles for their own safety. It is the responsibility of the horse owner to become educated, especially if they are around other horses and owners. Avoiding situations we don't know how to deal with is prudent - not finding out how to change rude or dangerous behavior is not.

Letting a horse be a tyrant is not a safe and happy situation. For this reason I have focused on teaching people, not to ride, but to have the confidence to ride by having control of their equine partners in a healthy productive relationship governed by the rules of Natural Horse behavior. Once people gain control and understand how to guide their horses to do what they would like in an accepting manner, it is amazing how a rider's seat changes to a more natural, balanced position where they don't hang on the horse and impede its movement.

There are many instructors who train by teaching how to ride. I am a believer that you have to learn to operate with your horse as a team where you are the leader and the horse the follower before you are ready to refine riding skills. First and foremost, you must learn what is safe. This is where I see my role as an educator of people learning to "Play with Horses" in a positive leadership role and building Courage, Confidence, Compassion, and Understanding in both partners. I find this rewarding and instrumental in developing more owners that are happy with their horses.

My clinics are based on first developing a good foundation on the ground then later showing how these skills and exercises can be transferred to any discipline. First a horse has to learn to be respectful, then to be obedient, and then more significantly, later, to act responsibly. To do this positively you have to temper this experience with the knowledge of what makes a horse comfortable and to reward the most minute try in learning a new skill. When a horse feels that you are fair and kind with strong leadership, they will usually start to follow the lead in a more cooperative fashion.

Even more importantly, is to teach people how to use some of the natural reflexes of the horse that allow them to relax, then turn them into faithful cues allowing us to take them to a happy, safe place whenever we need to.

The more a horse is allowed to feel good about its attempts the less it will be worried about trying new tasks even if they may have a natural apprehension of the task. Taking the negative tension out of any situation liberates the horse's natural ability to be athletic by keeping the emotions in a good zone where they can be their intelligent, curious self.

"Training for Courage" is what friends of mine have coined what I teach. The term seems to be appropriate. My approach is to build courage in the horse and the handler in everything they do - from basic respect exercises, simple to complex riding skills, confidence building tricks (Circensic Dressage), spanish reining skills even High School. I start at the same place with everyone but

where I go with each participants will vary depending on what they are ready for or have laid the groundwork for, as well as their desires.

I have said often the horses don't care what hat or tack you ride in but rather the way they are allowed to be comfortable and secure. The difference in most disciplines is the degree to which a skill is developed and expressed. The start is usually the same, the expression, embellishments and fortitude may change. One of the most common road blocks encountered is that people don't know where to start in gaining respect, where they began to lose it in the first place, or what the building blocks are that lead up to more complex skills. My purpose is to act as a guide - to assist them where they might need it but to allow them to struggle just enough to develop self-sufficiency for when I am not there.

Creativity is one of the key components needed to develop a harmonious relationship. It prevents boredom, adds our personal flavor, builds confidence, athleticism, and expands the limits of what we can do. The key for me is to teach people to think of what they could do - not what they can't. This is one of the reasons I like to teach kids...or to teach adults to be more youthful!

Guaranteed, in my clinics, participants will learn to safely expand what they thought were limits. In doing so one of my prime responsibilities is to trouble shoot where owners don't read their horse's language appropriately and are not aware the horse is stressed or threatening. On these occasions I help by offering suggestions or handle their horse for a few minutes so they can see how to deal with such a situation safely. It is imperative that neither handler, nor horse be injured in the journey.

When you want to improve your riding skills go see a riding instructor. If you need to improve the cooperation in your horse to follow your suggestions safely and to gain the confidence that you are in control, go see someone who trains people to lead horses in the "Way of the Horse". In setting up clinics I try to be flexible to the area and group trying to organize the clinic so that more people can develop improved relationships with their equine friends on a two way street.

I have often had people question why I have participants with such a wide range of skills at my clinics. I embrace this, as the novice can see where they might want to go. On the other hand, the novice without negative prior experience often excels with their horse because they are a blank slate and can show more experienced horse people how much can be done if we have an open mind and don't let past experience get in the way.

Experience can be good or bad. Good experience is always of value, Bad experience is only of value if we learn to never repeat it. People come to clinics to be inspired but also come to realize that an exceptional relationship with a horse is for everyone who is willing to pursue the journey. Doing so with the support of like-minded people is a blast. These clinics are about helping you be the best you can be - so when you are on your own you have enough confidence to enjoy your horse safely and creatively.

If you need more information, feel free to email me.

Best wishes, hope to see you out.

*Paul Dufresne*