

Our principal responsibility as the mentor/caretaker, the one in charge, the one in control, concerned/caring horse owners and the supposedly more intelligent of the two species must be to always ask WHY before making any judgment of a horse's actions (or using any type of reactionary punishment to what we consider an improper action that a horse has made).

To do otherwise, could very well be considered by some as arrogant, blind abuse of the worst kind that will truly foretell the age-old adage: "You reap what you sow."

Equine Funktionslust is not just an expression. Nor is Total Equine Environmental Enrichment.

They are a combined philosophy and way of life that develops not only a day-to-day, practical, highly functional working partnership but also acquiring the optimum levels of an intimate interspecies friendship between the human and equine species.

Give him every opportunity possible to enjoy his work without pain, fear or resentment.

You will never regret it.

For the questions are NOT, "How can I make him DO something?"

nor...

"How can I make him NOT do something?"

The real questions are;

"How can I make him feel like he is the greatest Horse that ever lived?"

"How can I modify his perception of me from being just another controlling human to a trusted friend that will never put him in harm's way?"

"How can I alter his regard for our mounted activities from monotonous drudgery to scintillating adventurous achievement?"

"How can I endear his mind to embrace his spirit, instead of diminishing it?"

In short, "How can I win his heart?"

Looking beyond the obvious causes, such as a saddle that is not comfortably fitting the horse, or the influence of bad teeth, bad feet and of course bad riding and training, we can look within. The horse's back is a nightmare of a garden where pain can grow from the many peripheral nerves that run from the spine to the viscera and vice versa, as well as to the musculo-skeletal outer body. Any compromise of these nerves at all, especially the sciatic nerves, will induce bucking. Eighty percent of all internal problems can have a direct effect upon the external. Bucking is not bad behavior; it is a physical reaction to stimuli. Get rid of the pain before you train!

Kissing spine, the fusion of the vertebrae, fusion of the sacroiliac joint, kidney problems, ulcers, a worm aneurysm, a pinched nerve, castration scars, ovarian cysts, a bean in the willy ... the list is endless. So before such a question is asked of a trainer, the owner should have checked the horse for any such problems herself and then if unable to rectify the problem, the next missing step in the answer, the most simple, and the most important, is "have you seen a vet?"

~ *Possible reasons for a horse "acting out" when saddled and/or ridden.* ~

(1.) Sore back. Poor saddle fit, in sufficient or worn pad, vertebrae out of alignment, etc. (Reference #16).

- (2.) Girth sores, insect bites or a minor injury where girth or saddle is positioned (or sensitivity from same).
- (3.) Mouth sensitivity. Includes (but not limited to) mouth/tongue/lip injury or sores, hot spot from bit or sharp spot on bit, abusive/improper use of the reins (commonly referred to as 'bad hands') 'tongue-over bit or a horse that is unaccustomed to the restricted breathing/choking sensation of the bit. (Reference #16.)
- (4.) Eyesight. Diminished visibility due to old age, temporary infection or injury that is not immediately obvious, which would increase apprehension/fear due to the horse's diminished ability to survive insofar as detecting a predator attack.
- (5.) Too little regular association/interaction, exercise and/or no habit or pattern established of doing even limited riding on a fairly regular basis to imprint a positive Life Pattern.
- (6.) Too much and/or too "hot/rich" of a supplemental feed. (Excessive energy patterns, etc.)
- (7.) Internal ulcers, illness/trauma, (whether chronic or acute) etc, that the horse tolerates under less stressful, normal living conditions but is forced to exhibit discomfort/displeasure when engaged in mounted activities.
- (8.) Growth spurt causing a young horse to test and possibly reestablish himself to a higher herd rank than his rider. (The "terrible Twos and Threes.")
- (9.) Emergent Emotional Intelligence/Maturity. While two and three year olds look physically fit to carry a rider and tack, the equine bone structure does not mature until it is six or seven years old. Their back is the last part of his bone structure to mature. This is directly proportionate to his emotional maturity and would be comparable to expecting the average four-year-old human to sit attentively through an entire opera without once squirming or squiggling in impatience and/or distractive inattention. (If this is the case, you are riding a horse that is not physically or emotionally mature enough to be ridden.)
- (10.) Abnormal need for ascension in herd rank (genotype). This is exemplified when a horse of small stature and low herd rank is constantly seen with injuries caused by his continuous, insistent challenging horses of higher herd rank that are forced to wreak physical punishment for CONTINUALLY challenging them.
- (11.) Abnormal aggressiveness (genotype) as displayed by an Alpha's constant physical attacks on other horses of lower herd rank for seemingly no apparent reason. While genetic in origin, it may also be aggravated by a lack of confidence in maintaining present herd rank (much like the proverbial grade school bully). This abnormal aggressiveness may also be due to a complete lack of formative, early life socio-cultural learning facilitated by our present day care and management practices.
- (12.) The horse lacks self-confidence in the rider and feels that his herd rank, position and/or very survival is threatened by submission to the rider. (Reference #18 & #21.)
- (13.) Bipolar disorder, (and/or other possible neurological disease/trauma.)
- (14.) A mare's overreaction and abnormal sensitivity to estrous. (Also pain caused by pressure or girth and/or riding on Ovarian cysts.)
- (15.) An adverse drug reaction, (oral or subcutaneous/intravenous injection) consumption of toxic plants or contaminated hay/feed may cause chronic and/or acute pain and/or sudden mood changes.
- (16.) Previous life experiences associated with a negative stimuli implanting a fear imprint on the Amygdala. Either abusive handling, abusive mounted activities and/or a mild injury in what the horse deemed a life-threatening situation. Associative situational circumstance activates an abnormal oppositional or fear/flight response (similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in humans.) This can be triggered by a situational environmental stimuli as well as a physical touch to a specific part of the body, a specific sound or a specific scent.
- (17.) Positive Response trigger/imprint is not deep enough to control and/or calm horse with a verbal 'Calm Down cue' when the horse feels the excitation of a severe apprehensive survival/stress situation (cortical override of a fear/flight reaction to a negative stimuli induced by an Amygdala fear imprint).
- (18.) Insufficient relationship/trust factors. Suppressive imprint is inadequate to instill cortical override and nullify previous fear imprints and/or separation anxiety disorder. Inadequate trust factors and nonreciprocal communication levels result in a confrontational relationship versus a harmonious partnership. This results in

minimal (if at all) Peer Attachment and a complete absence of a "Herd of two within the herd" co-dependent relationship.

(19.) Emotional trauma (oppositional defiance disorder) caused by excessive stalling and/or disassociation and lack of interaction with other horses and/or natural freedom of movement.

(20.) PTSD / fear imprint triggered by association to the specific olfactory or visual stimuli (cologne/deodorant) or apparel/accessory such as a particular hat, coat, etc, (may also be gender specific).

(21.) Rider induced lameness, soreness or discomfort caused by a rider that is unfamiliar with the biomechanics of the horse's body in movement carrying a rider. (Reference #16.) Inexperienced or apprehensive/fearful rider that has not acquired the necessary balance, coordination, independent seat and confidence needed.

While rider induced lameness is an accepted possible cause of varying degrees of physical trauma/disability/stress, rider-induced stress caused by the novice, inexperienced rider's own apprehensive heart rate, emotional state and anticipatory fear are transmitted to their horse.

(Which results in a 'catch 22 self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.')

Reference: Linda Keeling, PhD, and colleagues at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Professor Ellen Gehrke, Alliant International University and the Institute of HeartMath.

(22.) Fear imprint reaction actuated by tolerating the emotional pressure of a specific situational environment (being ridden-and/or ridden specific places). This may have been caused by the present rider on his back or a previous rider that exhibited unfair treatment and/or physical punishment, (a form of PTSD).

(23.) Teeth: #1. TMJ misalignment due to improper/inadequate 'floating' and bite alignment resulting in limited biomechanical function of the temporomandibular joint, (TMJ). This sequentially affects ALL parts of the body from the head and neck to the back, legs and feet).

(24.) Bone spurs, wolf teeth, blind wolf teeth can also cause a great deal of pain, (especially when bitted) which in turn elicits aversion, avoidance and oppositional defiance behavior.

(25.) Hoof problems. Pain from overgrown bar, high heels, contraction, deteriorated frogs, thrush and abscesses is common and often masked by shoeing until it is so serious as to cause visible lameness. Horses adapt by shifting resting posture to alleviate pain and strain on ligaments and tendons, pain in the joints and muscles of the shoulder, neck, back, hocks, hips, etc. and by moving with shortened strides exhibiting toe first or flat footed landings.

(26.) *I have also heard that the girth can press on the Vagus nerve of some horses causing an irregular heartbeat that results in extreme "cinchiness" and or bucking when first mounted. The Vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve. It is a mixed sensory and motor nerve.

It is my understanding that the neurological system is divided into central and peripheral areas - the brain and spinal cord make up the Central Nervous System (CNS). There are 12 cranial nerves that originate in the brainstem to innervate the organs of sight, smell, and hearing, the muscles of swallowing and mastication, the tongue, sensation of the face, and use of the eye and facial muscles. Abnormalities of these nerves will produce changes in head carriage, balance, eye position, ear and eyelid tone and position, vision, smell, hearing, and problems prehending, chewing, and swallowing food. The 10th cranial nerve, the Vagus nerve, also affects cardiac function, respiratory function, and GI motility.

Given the horse's incapability to communicate using traditional training formats, he has little choice but to

disobey by jiggling around and/or bucking when, in HIS judgment, due to fear, apprehension, pain, discomfort and/or frustration as HE thinks the situation warrants.

*Any of the preceding (or any combination thereof) could very well result in the "spooking at nothing" of an obviously familiar object to jiggling and actual bucking in an attempt to dislodge the rider as well as a 'Jekyll and Hyde' personality.

This is traditionally viewed as "bad behavior" when in fact it is a complete lack of insight, knowledge and understanding on the part of the rider.

There are several key factors involved; Communication, Understanding, Trust and Intimacy.

Communication: If the horse has not been given the opportunity to communicate his feelings, then his only recourse is to communicate his feelings the only way he can (by jiggling, spooking or bucking). If a horse bucks in a manner that may possibly dislodge his rider, he is literally screaming at his rider that something is terribly wrong (either with their relationship and/or external stimuli). His "inappropriate actions" are directly due in great part to not having an acceptable mode of communication (i.e., no reciprocal communication allowed).

Understanding: An extensive knowledge base of the Equine species' instinctual, emotional, intellectual and physiological facets would be an essential prerequisite. This would give one in-depth judgment factors in determining the extremity (if any) of the specific personality traits of an individual horse and "why he acts the way he does." Thus it not an initial requisite of the behavior modification of the Horse, but rather the needed knowledge and perception modification of the human.

Intimacy: To develop the highest possible level of Intimacy, one would need to know the exact steps that all horses use to establish and nurture Equine Friendship (Peer Attachment) with just one other horse in the herd. We cannot instill our values of friendship and camaraderie in the Horse. He has his own and has refined them for thousands/millions of years. It would therefore seem logical to use his judgment and value system (if one desired to reach the highest possible levels of an intimate interspecies friendship).

Trust: Trust, (that is, positive trust not negative trust) is directly proportionate to the established levels of Communication, Understanding and Intimacy. If we cannot clearly communicate our intentions, there is no basis for establishing any appreciable level of Understanding or Intimacy. We would never think of asking a stranger from a foreign land to completely trust us with his life in what to him would be potentially deadly situations. Yet we constantly expect this of the Horse from the first moment we touch him. Our human culture is filled with idiosyncrasies. In America, it is customary when meeting someone to shake hands. Yet in India, upon meeting, shaking hands with a woman would be considered very rude. In Japan, one would bow instead of clasping hands. Just as International businesses must learn each other's cultural mannerisms to communicate and establish a rapport, we must also learn the cultural mannerisms of the Horse (if we desire those unequivocal levels of Trust, Understanding, Communication and an intimate relationship).

None of the above take into account the possible extremes of the selective abnormal sensory sensitivity of any particular horse nor the genotypical ethogram of his Basic Origin.

Sincerely,

Chuck Mintzblaff & Kids

Lady, Able, Sundance, Boss, Rebel & Combustion

(and Nikki)