

## DISCIPLINE OR MISGUIDED ENERGY?

Q: Does the horse have a discipline problem, or misguided energy?

A: It is easy for a person to say, "My horse has a problem." With that attitude the person is handicapping a situation that could easily be turned into a learning session for both horse and human instead of a problem.

Misguided energy is often labelled as disrespect or a discipline problem; many times it is not a lack of discipline but rather a lack of direction. Taking the responsibility and having the foresight to set up a situation can easily produce a positive outcome for both the horse and person.

For example: the person and the horse pulling on a halter and pushing against each other's shoulders. This is a common scenario and it is also unnecessary. We have utilized the horse for thousands of years for his power and intelligence. He has more strength than us so we need to outwit him.

Personal space is something that is important to the horse, once we nullify this, several problems can develop. This is a natural instinct of the horses, this is why they run away in the wild or resist a person catching them; they need personal space. Once we violate this we develop disrespect or discipline issues.

It is easy to maintain respect and discipline by maintaining their personal space; the horse will honour your space unless he is taught to be numb by constant meaningless pressure.

Take the horse that wants to graze, instead of pulling the halter, set it up so your foot happens to be positioned under his neck and as the horse gets to the ground to take a bite, your foot bumps his lower jaw very subtly. If he perceives he hit his jaw as he lowered his head this will discourage him from lowering his head and eating.

For the horse that wants to be moving or going somewhere, instead of trying to suppress this energy, send the horse out on some rope, as he gets past you tip his nose toward you step toward his tail and send him in a circle. If you were standing you would basically be lounging him, if you are going somewhere, you can be walking somewhat of a line with the horse jogging around you as you travel.

This simple procedure can use up some of the horse's energy while conserving yours, and by changing directions and size of the horse's circles the horse can get handy about being pushed out or drawn in as he moves.

Some people think disciplining is something the horse needs to learn, they expect to force it into the horse. You may force discipline but not respect, respect can get discipline, but discipline may not get respect.

A prison guard may have a level of respect of prisoners that are disciplined, but this may have developed through force, the prisoner likely made all the sacrifices in the relationship not the guard. If the guard loses his power over the prisoners, they have no relationship because it was based on fear and power.

In another scenario, take a grandfather, mentor figure to a young boy. The mentor is carrying for the younger ones welfare, glad to make the sacrifices necessary to benefit and advance the young. The young may not have any appreciation until he realizes the knowledge and effort put forth for his benefit. Then the young recipient, after some trials, can realize and appreciate what the mentor has to offer. This type of learning can reap a deep respect and a strict discipline. Self-respect produces self-discipline, but self-respect is developed by receiving respect.

The horse can separate firmness coming from a person with a soft heart versus a person with a hard heart. The application from the soft heart would only set the minimal boundaries needed and be quick to offer release, the horse can sense compassion. On the other end the hard heart will deliver some extra pressure. This may be driven by anger or ego on the person's part.

Being humble enough to accept some of, if not all, the responsibility for an undisciplined relationship, may help earn some respect and honour than a certain level of discipline may evolve from that. Dominance or respect can be earned or forced. Force would be bringing pain or pressure to the horse to cause or alter his movements, "give to pressure." Using volunteered movement and setting up consistent boundaries that would not cause stress or pain, allows the horse to evaluate with an open mind the difference between self-inflicted discomfort and whatever degree of relief. With proper evaluation and design of circumstances presented to the horse, he can willingly discover the relief.

I have no doubt based on experiences and witnessing some individual horse-human relationship, if the person can set their ego and agenda second to the horse's needs the respect and discipline will come and the horse will submit and willingly allow the person to dominate his movements even in excellent and extreme conditions. Granted, this is something maybe more easily talked about and for a lot of us difficult to live by and apply, but I am confident with enough consideration from the person, the horse's desire can develop. And with experience and good judgment from the person and some physical ability from the horse, some interesting achievement can be reached.

Good Luck and God Bless  
Martin Black