

## WHAT MAKES OUR HORSES UNRESPONSIVE?

The answer: Boiled frogs. Our horses are extremely sensitive animals. They can also be very trainable, that's what makes them such good partners. They can learn to be very tolerant, even to pain and discomfort. At one point a horse can be afraid and fighting for their life and we may not even have physical contact with them. That same horse later in life can be unresponsive or desensitized to the same and even greater pressures or pain.

How do we do this? Or my question in many cases is "why do people do this?" I believe in many cases the people are getting boiled along with their horses and don't even realize it.

Frogs adapt to any temperature as long as the change is gradual. If you take a frog, put it in cold water and slowly turn up the heat, the frogs' body temp will slowly increase with the water and the frog will not notice or respond from the change. On the other hand, you can drop a frog directly into hot water and it will jump out realizing the sudden change it was exposed to.

This is what I see so many times with people and their horses. They slowly increase the pressure and wait for their horse to respond, then increase the pressure and wait, then after no response, add a bit more pressure until it takes quite a bit of heat to get a response. When we make gradual changes, our horses learn to tolerate it. The slower we turn the heat up the less noticeable it is. When we want to desensitize areas this is an effective and positive method. But let's do a self evaluation; do you need to kick or ask repeatedly to start or maintain motion with your horse? Is your horse desensitized to your cues? The horse can feel you getting ready to kick them and if they understand the direction and rate of speed intended they can respond accordingly.

The fly lands softly on them then suddenly bites them causing a quick change of awareness. The horse makes a sudden adjustment by attempting to get rid of the fly. If this is all it takes to get the horse to react, maybe we should reevaluate what it takes for us to get a response. It is important that we reward the horse for acknowledging our request, and not expect a specific result, only a change. If they are acknowledging the pressure, they are responding. It may not be the response that you want and if it is not, then you need to ask them in a different way. When we ask them to go, if we give a light comfortable signal then reinforce it with enough to get a response like going from a comfortable 65 degrees to an uncomfortable 100 degrees, they will hunt the 65 degrees. If we want to operate between 70 degrees and 80 degrees, when the horse experiences 81 degrees we should suddenly increase the temp to 90, 110 or even 150 degrees if we need to until the horse realizes and responds to the sudden change. Then when the horse knows they can stay between 70 and 80 degrees, they won't want to experience 150, 110 90 or even 81 degrees.

Our presentation will determine the response we get from our horses. We can softly motivate and direct them like the fly or we can slowly boil them like a frog. Some people may think of it as being rough or harsh when a horse may get startled, but it only happens periodically in carefully measured doses and is always preceded by a warning. It may be a lot more humane than boiling them without anyone noticing, even the horse.

Good horsemanship is no doubt a fine art. People can't teach people horsemanship. People can help people learn about horses and develop their horsemanship, but it has to come from the horse. The horse is the only one that can and will confirm if your horsemanship is effective.