

YOUR “RESPONSE-ABILITY” AS A HORSE OWNER

Owning a horse in today’s environment requires us to take an incredible responsibility into our lives for the well-being, health and safety of an animal who relies on us, in many situations, almost 100%.

We keep horses in a very different lifestyle to that which their wild cousins are used to living in, however domestication of horses has become a way of life for them and true for many generations now - the horse you have out there in your paddock probably comes from a background of years’ worth of domestication and specific breeding that has evolved them into the animal they are today.

Not only must we take on the responsibility for their daily care and well-being, we must also take on the responsibility of our own personal effect that we have on these creatures.

I say “Response-Ability” because, at any given time, we all have the choice of how we are going to respond to something happening in our lives right now. How we choose to respond to our surroundings, situations, other people, or the horse we are dealing with, will have a major effect on how we cope and how things continue on for us from there.

Horses are great teachers of this for our everyday lives because they live so much in the present with no knowledge of the future or what we might be going to do with them today, they simply respond to what is happening. If you approach a person or a horse with hatred or anger, there is a high chance that is what you will also get back (or they just won’t have anything to do with you!). If you sit back and wait around for things to happen for you, chances are it never will. If you lay blame on others for things that you could have controlled yourself, you will never progress or feel at peace with yourself because you’ve given away all that power and lost focus on where you were headed.

When things are going well with our horses, our confidence tends to grow and we feel proud of what we have achieved together. This then tends to expand and we start to explore further out of our current comfort zone learning new things and achieving more and more.

When things suddenly go wrong with our horse, or we strike a problem or two, we can often feel disillusioned or unsure about what went wrong and how to go about fixing it. There are many different ideas on horse training out there and a whole lot of different people eager to give you their well-meaning advice but, at the end of the day (and if you are prepared to listen), one of the best coaches you could ever have is standing right beside you or the one you are sitting on - your horse.

See if you can take a moment to understand why his responses or actions have changed or caused the problems you are now facing. Take responsibility by using your own experience, memory and knowledge to cast your mind back to when things were going well and then forward to now – what have you changed or done differently in that time?

The way we respond to issues, problems and difficulties that come up in our lives is indeed what makes us stronger and better-rounded as a person. Anyone can be happy when things are good but when the chips are down is what actually tests us. Our attitude towards things can have a dramatic effect on how the end result pans out simply depending on how we react to it.

If your horse is showing you difficulty with something, it is up to you as his rider and trainer to take on the responsibility of helping him learn the correct way or showing him he can do it. This might mean taking a few steps back to re-establish what was easy and help him understand the process again or re-building confidence a level or two below before building your way quietly back up. It might also mean you need to work on your own ways of doing or asking for things too.

If your horse is really enjoying his work and showing great enthusiasm for doing things with you, it is also your responsibility to protect that generous, hardworking, willing nature by appreciating his effort through equally generous, positive encouragement and reward. We must be careful not to push for more and more and more too quickly until his keenness, energy levels or confidence starts to turn sour.

The people that you hear constantly laying blame on their horse are the ones who don't want to accept responsibility for themselves. The repetition of words like BUT, SHOULD, EXPECT and IT are all warning signs! Horses' don't lie, they only know and show the truth of what is. If you've blown your cool and pushed or pulled under pressure, chances are the seemingly pear shaped results are not actually your horses fault.

Of course the horse can also make mistakes or find different situations stressful or difficult, but we have to learn to grow up and deal with those moments through understanding the enormity of what we are actually asking of our horses in the first place, and then try to find ways of dealing with it in a calm, respectful manner while appreciating what these awesome animals are mostly so willing to do for us overall.

Ask yourself... "How can I help this horse better understand or cope with this situation we are in right here right now"?

Horse riding is ultimately a unique partnership formed between you and your horse so put yourself in the position of responsibility - check your "Response-Ability" is coming from a place of understanding and compassion instead of worry, self-doubt or blame, and you will usually find a sense of calm confidence will wash over you as you think through ways to be able to help your horse - your partner - out. Just like you would if you were showing a young child how to tie their shoelaces or hit a ball, if you are in the position of being the coach, leader or trainer, the attitude you give out will either quietly encourage learning and progress or shut it down completely. Which would you rather offer to your horse?

This same line of thought is why motivational speakers around the world talk about life being a mirror and what you put out there you get back. We might not always be able to control the situation we are in, but we can ALWAYS choose how we respond to it. As horse owners we are all very lucky because we get the advantage of being able to practise our attitude and responses with our amazingly willing (and forgiving!) equine friends before we face our human counterparts the same. Try it out today!

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