

If The Subject Is Horses...

Marv Walker

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Introduction

In this series I write about odds and ends that I have gathered and used in over 60 years of being involved with horses and people in one way or another.

I began the journey as a "cowboy" who was going to ride even if it killed me and the horse - sometimes it almost did - and discovered there was a "horse way."

Some 30 years ago I became aware there was another way of dealing with horses. Instead of jerking them into my world any way I possibly could I began to go into their world and treat them in a way they could understand and accept.

What a difference it has made in me, in the horses I work with and in the people around me!

Today horse people from all over the world visit my [high traffic website](#), order my how-to information, [email](#) and call me seeking my input with their horse problems.

"If The Subject Is Horses I'll Say..." contains the information and knowledge the horses have shared with me.

It is my hope these offerings may help horses and their humans in some way to pay back what horses have given me.

~Marv Walker

**THIS IS...
A WARTZNALL PRODUCTION
IT'S NOT INTENDED TO BE PRETTY
JUST POWERFULLY INFORMATIVE!**

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Infected

“I grew up a dreamin' of bein' a cowboy, and lovin' the cowboy ways. Pursuin' the life of my high-ridin' heroes, I burned up my childhood days...” (*My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys* – Vaughn)

It was 1950, I was six years old when my dad brought home a TV he had acquired somewhere. It was not anything like the wall-sized like things of today. Okay, it was wall-sized to a six year old anyway, it took two grown men to haul it through the door, as big as it was it had a screen the size of a cigarette pack. It was a color TV with three colors, black and white TV screen and the Mahogany color of the finish on the expanse of wood that surrounded the dinky little screen.

We lived in a tar paper shack in an Upper Peninsula of Michigan cedar swamp. We were so far back in the woods the TV signal had to come in the mail from one of the two or three TV stations just over on the other side of the world. But that didn't stop the whole family from gathering around babbling excitedly as my dad turned the thing on and it slowly hummed to life with the prettiest picture of a blizzard you ever saw. My dad stressed the importance of patience as he fiddled with the magic Rabbit Ears that were supposed to snatch the TV signal out of thin air.

Suddenly the blizzard cleared away and there was the Lone Ranger riding full bore on Silver in blazing black and white glory. Nothing else in the whole world existed at that moment but the masked hero galloping on that screen.

A moment was all it took because as quickly as the blizzard cleared it started up again and the daring duo vanished from sight. But it was long enough to sear, to brand, if you will, my brain. I instantly knew what the purpose of the huge animals my grandfather had was. From that moment on he and I were bonded by a love of horses even though his horses were the pulling kind and not the galloping kind.

My grandfather had a Case tricycle wheeled tractor in 1960 that he had bought brand new in 1939. It looked pretty much like it did when he bought it all those years before. People would describe that tractor as "mint condition" because he kept it protected in a garage and because he would only use it when there was a job the horses couldn't do for one reason or another. It wasn't that he loved the tractor all that much, it was because he loved the horses that much. He would spend an hour harnessing the team to do a job he could have done in 5 minutes with the tractor while the tractor sat unused in the garage.

When not with my grandfather at his farm miles away my time was occupied with taming that TV. I hung pretty much any kind of metal I could find on the back of

that thing to improve its reception, pots, pans, old bed springs, I wasn't fussy. Anything for a few glimpses of my heroes.

Lone Ranger and Silver, Cisco Kid and Diablo, Roy Rogers and Trigger and a host of cinema cowboys fueled my days.

We didn't have enough money for a quart of oats but that didn't stop me. I did everything I could to be near horses. I ate and slept them.

This obsession affected my academic social life as well. The guys I ran around with during the week wanted to spend weekend evenings "chasin' women" in town. I'd leave Friday nights to hitchhike 80 miles to spend time at a riding stable in Escanaba, Michigan. This caused some raised eye brows. I never told them the girls outnumbered the boys better than 10 to 1 at the stables. I wasn't there for the girls.

I had struck a deal with the woman who ran the stable. I'd work around the place doing manual labor and my pay would be riding time. Turned out when it came time to collect my pay there was always cash paying guests that needed to be catered to or the horses had already put in a hard days carting lard butts around. There weren't any ride guide openings available, the girls already had them sewn up. I don't know if it was planned or not but I seldom got paid. It didn't matter to me, I was around horses.

Every riding stable usually had a lot more unrideable horses than rideable ones. These horses were usually vice ridden or had some chronic issue that prevented them from earning their keep so they lived off the more tractable horses.

If I was going to ride, it was going to be secretly riding the vice-ridden ones.

I developed a bit of a preference for the vice ridden horses.

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The Cowboy Way

Before I became enlightened I "cowboyed" the horses I dealt with. The "Cowboy Way" is what people who don't approve of your methods call the method you use with your horses if it is different than their method. Dealing with vice-ridden horses left me with the attitude of I was going to ride if it killed both me and the horse and a number of times it nearly did.

I did what it took to accomplish the task.

You see, I used the "Make the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard" approach that I'd learned from watching other people dealing with their horses over the years. If the horse did what I wanted, everything was cool. If the horse did what it wanted, things heated up.

Depending on the problem or the situation, I used a wide variety of things with horses simply because others did them as they loudly proclaimed their daddy or some other so-called expert insisted, "This is the way you gotta do it!"

One day I was going off to an all day trail ride some miles away. I went to my pasture to get a horse to take. The horse who showed up first was a superb very large Quarter Horse / Tennessee Walking Horse I'd had for a number of years. I slapped the halter on him and went to load him just like I had done so many times before.

He clipped his coronet band on the edge of the trailer as he was getting into the trailer and stopped. My quick wit brain immediately screamed, "HE'S REFUSING TO LOAD!! I NEED TO FIX THAT!!"

Five hours later he was in the trailer and neither of us were in any shape to go anywhere.

I did things to that horse that stick in my craw to this day. If someone had come along and shot me through both kneecaps and both elbows to stop me, they would not have heard a word from me about it.

When I was able to get around the next day I went back to see if he had learned his lesson.

He was a super horse. Maybe it was because he was dumb and didn't know better because as soon as I pulled up, who's the first horse to come up? Yep.

I slapped the halter on him and loaded him several times in the trailer exactly like I'd loaded him for years before and exactly like I loaded him for several years after.

I slapped myself on the back and praised my name to high heaven for solving that

problem.

What it amounted to was I had spent the better part of a day doing shameless things to a horse and solved a non-existent problem. I had made the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard and it worked just like I'd heard.

As far as I could tell he never did one thing in the years afterward to indicate he held that shamefulness against me. He certainly had the right.

The "Make the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard" approach is what causes the Gurus to start loading a horse at three o'clock and at nine the horse still isn't loaded as I observed once. The horse's owner had loaded the horse several times before the Guru began to demonstrate the right way to load a horse.

I won't name the Guru. Why? Because I'd been there.

Falling into the make the right thing easy, the wrong thing hard trap, is easy.

You may have heard of it as "The Cowboy Way."

I've tied up horse's legs, tie-downed them, thrown them to the ground and sat on their necks to keep them there. I've cranked them up just to calm them down so that if they got cranked on their own I could bring them down. I've used stronger bits to get their attention. I've tied their heads to the saddle to make them supple.

And if the horse was doing the wrong thing I made it hard on the horse.

I've done a lot of stupid stuff with horses.

I got hauled out to do some private work for a woman very active and influential in 4H. She wanted me to come and speak and teach a number of 4H groups she mentored. After working with a bunch of kids she took me to a farm, "They couldn't bring the horse to us because they haven't been able to get her in a trailer for about 4 years."

I said to myself, "No big deal, I often go to horses that can't come to me for one reason or another."

Then she said, "A good number of folks have tried to load her over the years,

including some well known names."

Then I said to myself, "Hmmm... It's rubber meets the road time. The worst that can happen is you'll be among some well known names."

We arrive at the farm and I see a two horse trailer sitting in the middle of a field surrounded by what looks like 50 people comfy settled in in comfortable chairs and coolers to watch the show.

And then I said to myself, "Yep. It's put up or shut up time for the Guru! You are on your own here."

I walk up and I'm handed the leadline of the mare and the owner goes to join the crowd of spectators. I move the leadline in one direction then the other to see if she leads then off we go to the trailer. In she goes, slick as oil. From arrival to loading, maybe ten calm quiet minutes, if that.

People leap to their feet. Cheers, whistles and clapping erupt, cameras flash.

"Tell us how you loaded the horse!" is the question of the hour.

They were a little taken aback when I told them I didn't load the horse, it was way too big for me to load it, it loaded itself.

It never occurred to me the horse wouldn't load. Therefore, I didn't need to worry about or deal with the wrong thing.

The "Cowboy Way" is to make the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard. The enlightened way is to not deal with wrong thing at all. Do the right thing and the wrong thing won't be a problem.

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The Blinding Flash Of Enlightenment

A husband and wife couple had tickets to a Linda Tellington-Jones mini clinic. Something came up so she wasn't able to go and he and I went along. I went along mostly to keep him company and to gather some info for a possible article. I was a

freelance author back then and wrote articles on various subjects to sell to various publications. A cowboy's perspective on hoity-toity horse handling, especially when it featured a world famous horse authority, was sure to sell to pretty much any horse mag.

The clinic began and the first demo horse was an Arab. In the arena it came, jiggling, back hollowed out, face level as an aircraft carrier deck, mouth gapped as the rider white knuckled the reins to hopefully aim the horse in the desired direction. I took one look and thought, "Yep. Typical Arab." The Arab made a couple passes around the arena and then Linda took the horse from the rider and began talking.

She began to talk about halters and the way they worked and then she threaded the leadline chain through the halter a different way and then using two fingers with obvious lightness she placed the horse's head in various positions using what was an incredibly obvious and subtle movement.

I thought to myself, "Hmmm... I can't do that."

By the end of the mini-clinic I was ready to sell all I owned and follow her to the ends of the earth. I signed up for several things, bought all the official equipment, read everything I could find about her.

Linda and I have identical personalities and we soon went our separate ways, not that she was all that aware of my presence or departure, but by then I was well aware there was a different way of dealing with horses other than the way I was doing it. Not that my way wasn't producing fine horses, I already had quite a local reputation for getting inside the head of a horse. It was just that I quickly realized my way was costly in time and injuries. I was on my way to discovering there was a better way.

Make no mistake. Linda Tellington-Jones is the only person to bring something totally new into horse training in the last 4,000 or so years and that is her TTouch. I know of no one who has worked with more horses than she has.

It wasn't too long before I developed a criteria anything for anything I do with horses. (1.) It has to be reasonably safe for human and horse. (2.) It has to work consistently during consistent situations. If a technique did not fit those conditions, I dumped it.

I looked at how people were dealing with their horses in a whole new way. What

were they doing? How were they doing it. Why were they doing it? What was the result?

Almost immediately the sudden volatile displays of rebellion and confusion that occasionally popped up in my horse handling began to dwindle away. The horses became far more co-operative. The more co-operative they became the more eager I became to learn how to make them co-operative.

In my research I came across a book written by one of the media darlings. Being a voracious reader who can't put down a book until it's read, I read through the angst-riddled tome and came away with just one bit of useful information - the acknowledging ear. I had noticed the acknowledging ear but had not given it that much credence until that moment. When I read that, I knew instantly how to do in mere minutes what had taken me months, even years to do before.

I left the house to go to the barn and my eyes fell on Dee...

We used to have a bunch of Morgan horses scattered across several states with most of them being on the New England show circuit. We had our trainer at the time bring some of our horses down to Georgia to show at a regional Morgan show a few days after we bought Dee. Our vet suggested we clean her up and show her at the show. We asked the trainer if he would show her. Dee was the hit of the show.

Our trainer asked if he could take her back with him. He was just starting off on his own and he needed show horses. The deal was he'd handle everything, all we needed to do was to pay the same costs we'd pay keeping her in the pasture at home.

For the next 16 years or so Dee was his ribbon horse. When he would take his client horses to a show he'd take her along. If his client horses didn't do well he'd enter Dee in a bunch of classes. If you were on her back or in the cart at the end of the class you placed high, most often blue. Show gawkers walking down the barn aisles would see all the displayed ribbons and think, "Wow! This guy is really good!"

At the right time we got out of the show horse business. The trainer was burning out and we were about to burst into flames ourselves.

"Do not let anyone ride that horse," the trainer warned just before she left to come home.

When the trainer's brother unloaded her from the trailer and handed me her leadline, he looked at her and said, "I rode that horse, once."

A couple others who had been on her at one time did not give glowing reports of the experience. When I expressed my intentions to ride her I was strenuously warned not to.

She was crazy. Spooky and jittery. If you were leading her you better know where she was and where she was heading at all times. You needed your wits about you. Something spook her she was as likely to go over you as not. If she was loose and heading up the barn aisle you didn't stand in the aisle waving your arms yelling, "Whoa! Whoa!" Generally speaking I found her a pain to deal with.

I left the house after reading the book to go to the barn and my eyes fell on Dee. In my new found awareness I thought, "I'm going to put some leading manners on her."

I took her in the round pen and in five minutes I had a totally different horse. I wandered around the pen in a daze as she stayed patiently glued to my side matching step for step listening to me going, "D#%\$! D#%\$! D#%\$!"

When I calmed down I knew, "I can ride this horse!"

I gathered up all my western gear and threw it on a back that had never seen a western saddle before while she stood rock solid totally unconcerned. I put my boot in a stirrup and put weight in it and she didn't move.

"Yep, I can ride this horse," I said gleefully to myself. This voice in my head called out, "You are the only one here and if something happens you are going to be laying here all day yelling 'Hep me! Hep me! Hep me!'"

The next day there was someone on the farm and I saddled her up and climbed on. From that moment on she was my favorite horse of all time, a trail rider's dream. From that day on until she could no longer be ridden because of age related issues she was a perfect horse. She was a perfect horse in retirement as well albeit a bit bossy and demanding.

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The Herd Benefits The Individual

Take one flake of hay out to a pasture full of horses and toss it over the fence.

In short order you will see the purpose of the herd.

The herd does not exist for the benefit of the herd. It exists solely for the benefit of the individual.

All peace, all comfort, all security is found in the herd.

In the herd there are more eyes and more ears to watch for danger. As a herd member you can eat, drink and sleep more than you can alone because you don't have to be as completely alert as you do alone.

If danger comes you don't have to be the fastest horse in the herd to get away.

Two buddies were out hiking when they encountered a large threatening bear. One immediately sat down and began changing his hiking boots for running shoes.

"You can't outrun a bear!" his buddy snorted derisively.

"I don't have to outrun the bear. I only have to outrun you," was the reply.

When you are alone you have to outrun the predator. No ifs, ands, or buts. It's do or die. When you are in a herd you only have to outrun the slowest member of the herd.

The herd exists solely for the benefit of the individual. However, the individual must actively claim and defend the benefits of the herd.

When you chucked the flake of hay into the pasture you saw this principle in action. One of the horses claimed the flake with a "This Is Mine!" attitude and the others got their share any way they could while honoring the claim or they waited until the claimer finished, if there was anything left.

The herd exists for the benefit of the individual most able to take and defend its taking.

The herd operates on the principle of take whatever rights you can and honor all the

rights you cannot take. This principle establishes the herd ranking or what we refer to as the "Pecking Order."

The horse who is the most able take and defend rights is the herd leader. It is at the top of the herd ranking. It controls everything every other horse does in the herd. It claims when, where and what it eats. It drinks when it wants. It claims the best spots to stand or sleep. It decides where to travel. It's good to be the herd leader.

Then there is the second ranked horse. It controls everything every other horse, other than the herd leader, in the herd does. Then there is the third ranked horse and so on, all the way down to the bottom of the ranking. We refer to this ranking as "low man on the totem pole," or "the bottom of the pecking order."

Almost everyone knows the Greek word for the herd leader - Alpha. We use the term Alpha for the top dog in the pack, top horse in the herd or any controlling member of a group. Few people know the Greek for the lowest member - Omega. When was the last time you heard the term Omega used?

If you are a Bible student you have probably seen the word in Revelation 1:8, 1:11, 21:6 and 22:13.

Know what?

It's better to be the Omega in a herd of a thousand than the Alpha in a herd of one. All peace, all comfort, all security is found in the herd. The more herd members there are the more sentinels there are to watch for danger. The more herd members there are the more the attention is taken off the individual.

Because the ranking, or pecking order, is determined by the ability to take and defend rights, the ranking is constantly subject to change. The more determined a horse is to be the herd leader, the more likely it will be the herd leader. Age, illness, adding or removing a horse from the herd and a number of other things can all affect a change in the herd ranking.

Since all peace, all comfort, all security is found in the herd it is in the horse's best interest to be in a herd. It is so important to the horse that it operates continually in a herd mind set even when it is by itself, with other horses or with a human or humans. A horse is always in a herd and it is always seeking its place in that herd even when it is with a human. Like it or not, you and the horse are a herd and that herd will have a leader. The one who has the most ability and is the most determined to be the leader will be the herd leader.

It is in the human's best interest to be the herd leader. Humans have rational reasoning ability and are able to think things through. If a dangerous situation arises the human looks for ways to lessen the danger such as keeping a set distance moving at a set pace, going by at the right moment. The horse is motivated only by, and acts through, individual self-preservation. The horse's way of dealing with danger is to quickly and blindly put as much distance between it and the danger as it possibly can. An unexpected noise in the brush from a bird gets the same amount of concern as a bear, lion, tiger or some other monster zeroing in on it.

The herd exists for the benefit of the individual and not for the benefit of the herd.

Horse and human relationships are generally happy medium relationships. We take an individually motivated being from a individually benefiting herd setting and bring it into a social setting benefiting the group and expect it to fit into social expectations. As long as neither party does nothing the other party can't accept and live with everything is cool. They have reached a happy medium.

If one party or the other does something the other cannot accept and live with, the relationship heads toward the drain.

Understanding the herd individual dynamic and the human social group dynamic and being able to operate within each at will allows us to quickly overcome attention, trust, fear and respect issues.

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The Dynamics Of The Pecking Order

Like it or not, no matter how much it offends our human social order that is designed for the good or survival of the group, horses live under a different dynamic . Some refer to it as "survival of the fittest," some refer to it as the "pecking order." Whatever terms one uses, horses live under a very blatant "it's me above all others" dynamic.

In our human social order we depend on each other and work together. We contribute to the greater good and in return we are allowed to share in the contributions of others. If we are too greedy or we take more than the group thinks we should take, the group as a whole then takes steps to limit our participation in the process. No one person in the group is allowed to have more than any other person in the group. We see this continually in life where children are constantly admonished to "share." The publication, "The Rainbow Fish," screams this principle and teaches it is not right to have more than anyone else and one only gets along by

sharing equally with others.

In the horse herd it is self-preservation at the expense of the herd members. The individual is all that matters. Horses operate with their earphones listening to the WIII.FM radio station - (W)hat (I)s (I)n (I)t (F)or (M)e?

The horse's ranking in the herd, or group, depends on its ability to take every right it can away from the others. Each member of the herd takes whatever rights it can and honors all the rights it can't take. The core dynamic is to either take a right or honor a right.

Imagine two horses heading for the same flake of hay. One we'll call Hay Claimer, the other we'll just call the other horse Other Horse. Hay Claimer signals Other Horse with a subtle ear movement, "Mine!" That means stay away. Other Horse ignores the ear and zeros in on the hay. Then Hay Claimer ramps up the ear signal by turning its ears back. That means, "Are you blind? This is mine!" Other Horse keeps coming in. That means, "I want it." Hay Claimer flattens its ears, snakes its head, maybe even shows its teeth. That means, "Come any closer and I'll take a plug out of you!" Other Horse keeps coming in. Hay Claimer then ramps up the signals and teeth and hooves fly.

Other Horse has two choices. It can fight for the hay or it can say, "If that's the way you're going to act, keep the hay." Either response determines the pecking order of the two horses in our example. If Other Horse gives way for whatever reason then Hay Claimer will be higher in the pecking order than Other Horse. If Other Horse decides to fight back and loses or gives way, same result, Hay Claimer is higher on the pecking order. If Other Horse causes Hay Claimer to give way or Hay Claimer loses the battle then Other Horse becomes higher in the pecking order than Hay Claimer and ends up with that hay and any other hay Other Horse wants that Hay Claimer has in the future.

Now, let's add another horse. We'll call the other horse, oh, I don't know, New Horse.

If New Horse can take the hay away from both horses it then becomes higher, number one, on the pecking order than the two original horses. If it can only take hay away from the loser of our original example but not from the winner, New Horse becomes the second ranked horse in the pecking order. If New Horse can't take the hay from either of the original horses then New Horse is the third ranked horse in our herd of three and the other two keep their ranking.

Lower ranked horses will always give way to higher ranked horses.

Every herd is ranked according to the ability of each herd member to take rights from other members. Each member is all alone in its ranking position. Two or more herd members may appear to be equally ranked but they're not. There may be very subtle differences in their ability to take rights but they are still ranked in the pecking order.

Each herd has a horse that is at the top of the ranking. This horse, almost always a mare, controls all the other herd members and we refer to it as the herd leader. Each herd has a horse that is at the bottom of the ranking. All the other horses in the herd control it. All the other horses rank somewhere between the herd leader and the lowest ranked horse.

The "take all the rights you can and honor all the rights you can't" rule is what determines the herd pecking order or herd ranking. The effect of this rule is what we call the herd dynamic. It automatically ranks the herd. And, it promotes peace and harmony within the herd - if you can't defend it, move away when someone who can wants it.

Our for the good of the group social dynamic says, "It ain't fair!"

Since the herd exists for the good of the individual it's better to be the Omega in a herd than an Alpha all alone.

All peace, all comfort, all security is in the herd. It's worth the cost of being the Omega.

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Taking Part In The Pecking Order

Horses are herd animals. The herd dynamic is genetically embedded in their DNA. Their survival and well being is rooted in the herd to the point that they include other non-predatory beings who are near by in their herd whether the other beings like it or not or are even aware of it.

If you and a horse are together the horse views you as a herd member and employs the herd dynamic in the relationship. One of you will be the leader. If it is you, good. If it is the horse, not so good. If it is you with your social good desires you steer your herd toward what is best for you and the horse. If it is the horse, it steers

the herd for its own good and its good, as it see it, is what benefits, or appears to benefit, it.

Most horse human relationships are happy medium relationships. The human brings the horse from a "it's all about me" herd situation into a "it's all about the group" situation and expects the horse to conform to the human social group dynamic. As long as neither party does something the other party can't live with they have reached a happy medium.

Even at this, a successful horse human relationship is the result of the human becoming higher in the pecking order than the horse. The more things you can get a horse to do, the higher you will be in the pecking order. The more things the horse can get you to do the higher it will be in the pecking order. We call this procedure, training. We do what we can to get the horse to do what we want. We insert ourselves into the pecking order to the degree we can do. Sometimes it takes a long time because it is mostly trial and error. We try things and if the horse complies, we rise in the pecking order. If it doesn't, we make no gains and may even lose status and become even farther below the horse's level.

It is to our benefit, and the horse's benefit, to speed this process up by eliminating confusion and letting the horse know from the beginning what we expect from it. We can very quickly show the horse that we are higher in the pecking order than it is by giving it a series of directions we know beyond a shadow of doubt we can get the horse to obey without touching it until it says to itself by its actions, "This being is giving me directions and I'm following them. Therefore this being must be higher on the pecking order than I am."

A horse is genetically pre-programmed to respond to set actions in a set way. If you understand this principle you can use the taking rights and honoring those you can't dynamic to place yourself where you want within the herd.

For instance, when the horse is presented with the action, "This is my hay, stay away!" it has two and only two responses to that action and it is free to choose which of the two actions it will use. One is to leave the hay alone. The other is to ignore the warning and move toward the hay. If it feels it has the ability to take the hay claimer's right to the hay away the situation turns ugly. The hay claiming horse either fights for the hay or it gives way. If the challenging horse is able to take the hay away it has established it is higher in the pecking order than the hay claimer. If it is not able to take the hay away then it is lower in the pecking order than the hay claimer.

If the horse cannot take the right away it must honor it. When a challenge to a right is defeated the challenger must honor the right.

Because we humans have reasoning abilities we use this dynamic to place ourselves higher in the pecking order than the horse. When we are higher in the pecking order than the horse it must watch us for our signals to make sure it is not interfering with any of our rights.

We place ourselves higher in the pecking order by giving the horse a series of directions it cannot defeat. We give the horse a series of directions we know beyond a shadow of a doubt we can get the horse to obey. Because the horse obeys what we tell it, it is unable to defeat our rights. Just like the higher ranked horse says, "My spot! My hay! Don't come near me! and so on, we tell the horse, "Go that way! Stop! Now, go that way! Go faster! Go slower!" Because the horse cannot defeat the directions it must place us higher in the pecking order than it is.

Once we have placed ourselves above the horse in the pecking order it has to look to us to see whether or not it is honoring our rights. Once the horse reaches this point it considers us to be its leader. We direct and control the horse just as a higher ranked horse would in the herd.

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Directions I Can Make Any Horse Obey

The key to claiming the number one position in the pecking order is to present the horse with a series of directions you know beyond any doubt you can get the horse to obey. If you can direct the horse then you must be the horse's leader. If you can direct ANY of the horses in the herd then you must be the herd leader.

Horses in the herd have their own set of directions they give each other. Their directions are relatively straight forward - "Mine!" The challenges are also relatively straight forward - "No, it's not!" Whichever horse has the greater ability will end up with whatever it has claimed whether it is the best grazing spot, best sleeping spot or first taste of the water.

The horses quickly work out their ranking within the herd. We have a mare that will immediately become the herd leader of any herd she is put with or she will be dead. She calls the shots and all the other horses give way. If they don't, hooves fly.

I quickly insert myself at the top of the horse's pecking order by giving the horse a series of directions without touching it or being connected to it in any way that it cannot challenge the directions. I give the horse a series of directions I know I can make the horse obey until it says by its actions, "This being is giving me directions and I'm obeying them. Therefore, this being must be a leader and I must be a follower."

The set of directions I use as the situation calls for them are:

- (1.) Don't ignore me.
- (2.) Go in that direction.
- (3.) Stop!
- (4.) Go in that direction.

If the horse is reacting slower or faster than I want I can adjust the speed of the horse.

Those four commands and the speed modifiers are what I know I can get the horse to obey.

The ideal enclosure to give the directions in is a round pen that is large enough to keep the horse away from you until shows you the respect a higher ranked horse deserves yet small enough to easily direct the horse.

I also have a longe whip with about a 5 foot handle and about a 5 foot lash. I use it as an extension of my being which allows me to reach anywhere in about a 25 foot area. Oh yeah, it also serves as an actual whip when I need teeth and hooves in case the horse should decide it wants to get aggressive. If the horse decides it is going to come in on me I will then light it up as fast as I can, as hard as I can, where ever I can. Will it stop an attack? Well, it may not. It sure won't if you don't have it and you don't use it when needed. And it will work a LOT better than a coiled rope that once thrown is pretty much useless. A vigorous application of the whip coupled with a bunch of animated movement and yelling will make him think thumping up on me may not be the best idea.

Sometimes, not often, the horse will start racing pell mell around the round pen on its own. This is a challenge, "I don't have to stay near you! You are not the boss of me!"

I defeat that challenge by stopping the horse from racing around. I do that by immediately going to where the horse was when I decided to stop it. It has left where I'm going. Since hopefully the pen is round, the horse is going to come back to that same spot. But I'm there saying, "My area! Come into my area and there will be trouble!" Just like a horse in a herd claiming hay, a sunny spot or water I'm prepared to fight for it. Now I weigh 160, the horse out weighs me by at least twice. If he really is determined to take my spot there is nothing I can do to prevent the horse from doing it. But it doesn't know that. I'm not a horse like its used to dealing with and it is a new situation to him. Chances are he'll stop and go back the other way to go around. I leave room for him to get by if by some chance he doesn't

stop because if he goes over me it is not going to be good. It will very likely mess up my whole day.

I stay in my wedge until the horse stops trying to circle and the overwhelming percentage of the time it will soon stop as far from me as it can get which is the other side of the pen. Then I got to the center and calmly and quietly continue to insist the horse obey my directions while using only the pressure I need to get compliance.

If it starts mindless circling again, I repeat the wedge claiming.

Once the horse is automatically obeying my directions in a relaxed compliant manner I then bring in the "You are doing the right thing" signal. When the horse is doing what I want I don't tell it to do anything else. I tell it to stop doing what it is doing by telling it to do something else.

If there is a horse I can't make obey my directions I haven't met it yet. There was an ultra aggressive horse at one clinic I stopped working with before it complied. I say ultra aggressive because when I gave him a direction he would simply turn and walk toward me with his weight equally balanced on all four legs ready to go in whatever direction I went. Earlier in the clinic we had taped his weight at 2200. He was very big. Every thing that worked with every other horse who did that didn't work with him. He was focused on me and it was obvious he was going to deal with me. I stopped working with him not because he wouldn't turn out like all the others but because his owners were clueless about his aggression. I didn't want to up the pressure needed to make him comply and have the owners think I was unnecessarily "beating up" on their horse. The reason they were clueless about his aggression was they always submitted to their baby before he felt the need to enforce his authority.

I honestly explained my decision to stop to the crowd and the horse's owner. I told them the horse was ultra aggressive and I did not want to use the energy necessary to over come his aggression because the horse's owner was unable to see that. I told them the reason the owners weren't able to see that is because they never did anything to make him aggressive because they let him call all the shots. The most obvious example was how they circle led him to where they wanted him to go. As long as he was heading in the direction they wanted to go they went with him. If he decided to go in some other direction they would go with him while encouraging him to circle until he was heading in the direction they wanted.

The owners naturally disagreed. I nodded understandably and told them when they became aware of his aggression to give me a call because I would like another crack at him.

Never heard from them.

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A Herd Leader Must Act Like A Herd Leader

I sometimes hear from folks who report that the herd dynamics procedure went textbook in the enclosure and the horse was in their pocket. But then when they leave the enclosure things start to unravel a bit until the next thing you know, they are back at square one. "What happened?" they ask.

I'm not really sure what happened because I wasn't there to see what happened but I have an idea. They left their herd leadership back in the enclosure.

A herd leader is a herd leader no matter where the herd goes. In actuality, the herd leader position is a mental position - "I am going to be the leader. Period. End of story." When one has that thought in one's head, the horse picks up on it. But, the thought has to be in one's head.

When a take rights or honor them situation occurs in the herd the higher ranked horse has no doubt as to how it will turn out. It will do what it has to to defend its position. In a horse human herd this is not always the case because doubts pop into the human's head.

The horse may challenge the human leader by some action such as, deciding to go another way than the leader, occupy the leader's space or yes, even bite, to express its desire to take that right and to see whether or not it can successfully take it.

If the human leader is determined to be the leader and has become the leader by presenting herd leadership actions to the horse and successfully defeated all its challenges the human then says, "Oh?? You seem to have forgotten who is the leader here. Let me refresh your memory. Go that way..."

The leader applies the same type of directions it applied to take the leadership in the first place. Once the leader understands the herd dynamics the dynamics can be applied at the end of leadline or reins. If the leader needs the freedom and space of the enclosure, back they go.

Some horses only need one presentation. Some may need touch ups. Over time,

touch ups if needed, will be needed farther and farther apart and will take less time. We had a Holsteiner stallion at one time who was a real pain. When I first started dealing with him I had to tune him up every day. He'd start acting up, back we'd go for another reminder. It got to the point where he was good for a couple of days. It got to the point where he'd start to act up and I'd think, "Time for a tune up," he'd immediately behave. We had another mare who was a real handful. She had been in a show barn with our trainer for 16 years and pretty much all she knew was the cranked up show world. When we brought her home the trainer warned us to not let anyone ride her because it was too dangerous. In about 5 minutes she had the picture and that one session stuck. She turned out to be the nicest riding horse I'd ever had until physical issues prevented her from being ridden.

People always seemed to be amazed at how horses that came to my clinics around the country as problem horses seldom demonstrated their problems with me. It was because I knew in my head beyond any doubt I was in charge. The horses picked up on it and responded accordingly.

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More Marv Walker

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People from all over the world contact me for assistance with some horse problem or question they may have.

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