

Training for Courage by Paul Dufresne

DANCE AT LIBERTY, PART 4: RECALL

In parts 1 to 3 of Dancing at Liberty, I discussed how you can affect your horse with your energy and body language by utilizing the three major zones. You can cause a horse to move away from you, to stop, or to turn toward you.



Pressure on hip



Turning in



Coming in

The focus of this installment is developing that “turn toward you” into a quality recall which includes some speed. It is valuable to have a horse that will come to you when you ask. To have a horse come to you with respect, politeness, and enthusiasm at a canter is positively exciting.

People may struggle with the respect aspect of their relationship. Either the horse comes to them but threatens to trample them or the horse is reluctant to come. Before you ask a horse to come to you, you want to make sure the horse understands moving away from you when asked. Once the horse understands this, you want to teach the horse to come all the way to edge of your bubble.

Horses that learn to move from our space when asked may then be somewhat reluctant to come right into it. For them to feel secure, they have to know you are a leader that is not a threat to their comfort, and that it is all right to come into your space - when asked to. It was common practice in the NH approach to allow the horse to run away or encourage it to do so if they choose to leave. However, causing a horse to run away may be counterproductive to teaching the horse to stay with you and engage in a positive interaction. The more you chase, the more it may get excited. The more they learn to do this, the less you can teach them. Some people don't understand that the more a horse runs in a negative shape (counter-flexion or inverted) the more the horse is physically/emotionally impaired. This physical and emotional negativity may encourage anxious resistance rather than respect.

What you want to do is add only as much energy to the horse's movement as it can relax in. The easiest way I know to get a horse to come to me is to have it comfortable moving away from me at a walk and then put pressure on the inside hip (zone 3) to cause the horse to turn in. I then move myself into its path while bringing the energy back into my core. If the horse comes forward, I will praise it by dropping the pressure and leave it alone. If this is repeated a few times the horse will start guessing to come to me.

If I just wait there calmly looking at them like a friend coming to visit and not staring them down with anticipation, they will keep coming forward.

Some trainers diminish their posture, which I would discourage. A calm, quiet lead horse does not have to make itself smaller to cause another horse to want to come into their space. You need to convince the horse with a calm and confident posture that it is okay to come in. A horse is inclined to want to be with the lead and will do so when it doesn't feel threatened. When the horse feels secure in the presence of the lead it will give to the suggestion willingly as it seeks the security offered by the relationship.

If a horse (some stallions especially) comes in too forward without respecting the edges of my bubble, I block it. The more bold the horse, the bigger my bubble. The more polite the approach is in watching for the outer limit of my bubble, the more I allow the horse to come in. I block the horse by merely raising my hand, shoulder, and whip (if necessary) telling it that this is close enough. If it complies and waits, then I take away my pressure and just relax with the horse.

If a horse starts to come in but gets distracted, I will wiggle the whip or flag behind me so it looks at me. My pressure is still drawing the horse in but I want it to keep paying attention to me. I teach the horse to come into positive leadership pressure. The strength in my presence and posture will vary with the confidence of the horse. I may be very solid for a pushy stallion, but softer with a less confident horse. You never want to look weak to the follower nor do you want to be oppressive in any way. That can be a difficult line for people to find and adjust with different horses.

As the horse becomes confident I then progress to having the horse move out and come in at the trot. Any time the horse makes an attempt to come in trotting, I will release the pressure and reward that. As the speed increases, remember to always keep your bubble clearly delineated.

I continue to hone this at a trot, and then I will progress to the canter. With my horses I like to whistle to call them in. This is

Training for Courage, cont'd



Cause him to track, whip flutter, and move sideways



Block forward movement - arm and whip flutter to bring attention to it (pushier stallion)



Hanging out; breathe and relax

clearly audible, signals an end to whatever exercise we were doing, and means that I want the horse to come in and hang out with me. I may step out forward and away from the horse letting my whip add energy from behind to get it to hurry in. I may reward with a treat if I ask the horse to hurry up and it comes in more quickly. All you have to do is be consistent and confident while you slowly build this.

When your horse comes in to you, celebrate it by playing or just hanging out. Too often we are so busy trying to train that we inhibit the possibility of a good connection with the horse because there is not enough calm in the relationship. The old expression “the slower you go the faster you go” applies with horses. Hmm... and people too! Coming up next month in this series: Playing and Collection at Liberty.

Paul Dufresne is a writer, performer, trainer and clinician in Pritchard, BC, who educates in Natural Horsemanship, Classical Arts, Liberty and Circensic Dressage. He teaches people to understand horses and, more importantly, how to tap into their relaxation reflexes in ways seldom seen in North America. In doing so, he is able to guide people in creative experiences where the human learns to be an effective, safe leader. The horse learns to be more emotionally secure and will respectfully follow while developing athleticism in a mutually courageous manner by having a deeper understanding of how they affect each other. Visit his website at www.trainingforcourage.com.