

Training for Courage by Paul Dufresne

DANCE AT LIBERTY, PART 3

In parts one and two of *Dancing at Liberty*, I discussed some of the effects of positive pressure on three major zones that cause the horse to yield in various directions. We started with having the horse yield forward by focusing on zone 1, sideways with bend in zone 2, and slowing/stopping or turning away from us with a focus on zone 3.



Relaxed walk, parallel and gazing at my friend Genil



Relaxed trot, travelling parallel



Good canter with pressure on rib cage.

The invitation to inside turns was then discussed, as well as using positive pressure to encourage the horse to come towards us. There can be many variations of general reactions to pressure depending on slight differences in your timing, energy and focus, and where the horse is at emotionally. In part three, we will deal with energy and gait control. This is too often under-developed, but is very critical as it applies to actual riding.

All of these liberty skills relate to more than just controlling space and solidifying your role as leader and the horse as follower. These skills, and our ability to control our energy and posture, relate to what we ask of the horse whether on the ground or riding. Horses often get confused by what we ask, and they have to sort out many of our inconsistencies as we ask them one thing while our body language and energy says another. It is important as a leader to be perceived clearly by the horse (with confidence) in that we mean what we say with our whole being.

This can be accomplished by having a very clear idea in our own minds of what we are going to ask and how. When I ask a horse (cue word as well) to move out at a

walk on the rail, my body has to have the energy of a calm, forward walk. As I lead by example, the horse will figure this out quickly. It's important to practice with the horse moving out in a nice calm walk, taking care of our own movement, and then the horse will join us feeling secure. I don't ask anything more than the walk until I am sure that I am relaxed, and then the horse will be also.

I first drive the horse forward, with bend (by looking at its rib cage). As the horse complies, I accompany my horse forward at a walk like we are going on a stroll together, so our path then becomes more parallel and less converging. When the horse understands, I give it a suggestion with positive pressure. Left alone to accept responsibility, the horse will feel my company, not my constant pressure, and thus our paths will become more parallel.

While compliant, I may look to the horse as I would look to a friend on a casual walk. If I look at the horse with intent when it is already compliant, this will cause it to be anxious. When the horse makes a good guess at what you want, leave it alone so that it will know it did well (as you are not still asking). When this is clear to me and my follower,

I can ask the horse to trot. I might not only use the cue word trot but also, more importantly, I will ensure my energy and self-carriage is the energy of a calm trot.

The rhythm changes in a trot; the steps are naturally quicker, more like when we would jog. An easy way to convey this is to just start jogging on the spot, urging the horse to move out (and it will). This jogging may be an exaggeration, but experiment with it and encourage your horse to move forward right after doing so and in a few short tries your horse will figure this out. Horses do well with this because it actually makes horse sense. The really interesting thing is that later when you might ride this horse, your seat bones can actually pick up the rhythm and energy of the trot, and so will your horse with slight encouragement.

Once the jog is under control, I then ask a horse to canter. I think of a strong, upward and forward walk, raising myself and my eyes into a canter, preferably not staring the horse down while doing so. Repeat this a few times; most horses get this quite readily using a bit of encouragement with the flag or whip from behind them. If someone is already tuned into their energy right from the start, the horse usually gets it quickly. The key is

Training for Courage, cont'd

to do it calmly and not get a horse into a running mode. Try to avoid the gallop, as this is associated with an adrenalin surge, which puts a horse into flight mode. Flight mode causes the horse to flee us, not stay, play and interact with positive energy. If our energy is meaningful, it won't be threatening - unless that was our intention (e.g. if the horse was being disrespectful). If we focus on controlling the space and not being threatening, this will send a quieter message to the horse, which causes it to be willing to follow our lead since we offer (calm) security. Horses are hard-wired to follow or lead. Remember, we want to affect them like a good lead horse, not a boss horse (who offers no security).

When you decide exactly what you want to ask the horse to do, make sure you breathe and then ask in a clear, relaxed way. Do this whether you are at liberty or riding because it works and you will feel

good doing it! Not breathing constipates your energy and the horse feels unsure and apprehensive. Stay relaxed in your energy when asking for a change in gait, so the horse will comply instead of becoming anxious.

The next installment on liberty will be on developing Recall with speed, as it is always fun to have a horse that comes to you at a canter when you call it.



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.

COME OUT OCTOBER 8th to the Equine Extravaganza in Pritchard and see some of Paul's TFC demonstrations. See their ad on page 9. Saddle Up will be there too!