

# Training For Courage By Paul Dufresne

## - REFLECTIONS ON DISCOVERING YOUR LEAD

Most people owning horses today realize they will have to acquire some type of knowledge in regard to developing a positive relationship with their horses. I believe that there are more quality trained educators in the equine industry than ever before. This is good - it means that more pertinent information is readily available.

**B**efore people decide what kind of horse they should have, they need to take inventory of the type of person they are and the type of leader they are. Unfortunately most people consider this after they have acquired a horse and often a mismatch is the result. When it comes to education, a clinician or instructor also needs to take into consideration the type of leader their student is inclined to be and the type of horse they are partnered with. The discussion below is a reflection of my opinion based on what I see on a regular basis at clinics. It is always a challenge for me as an educator but participants themselves also find it very difficult to identify their personal inclinations as a leader.

For a horse owner that wishes to have a quality relationship, where they and their horse are safe and enjoying each other's company, the owner has to realize that they have to be the leader. I am assuming that most people know this even if they don't necessarily act accordingly. It is worth taking the time and making some brief notes on how they see themselves in their relationship with their horse. What type of leader are they?

Authoritative – willing to earn the lead – educated/knowledgeable in knowing how - do they know clearly what they are asking of the horse? Do they understand the horse's body language or are they relating to it like a human? Are they calm, anxious, fearful, a leader or a boss (not the same)?

Middle (authoritative-submissive), this could be a good place to be if you are the

right one at the right time based on how the horse is behaving.

Submissive - coaxing the horse to do things, thinking or hoping that love and possibly treats will overcome any problems. Might have the leadline in hand but not so sure who is leading who.

Educated - does the horse owner understand the type of horse he/she has and what position in the herd it is inclined to gravitate too? Dominant-aggressive, competitive, calm, middle of the herd, subservient calm or anxious.

All of these types of horses will include some level of fearfulness when combined with their placement in a herd hierarchy. Prey animals tend to be naturally apprehensive of anything they are unsure of, eliciting the flight reflex. Humans may be fearful when they realize how powerful that horse is when inspired by the flight reflex. Horses are hard wired to lead or follow. They always want to know where they fit into the hierarchy so they will test. Your answers to those questions will usually determine their ensuing behaviour. An indecisive or insecure leader will be challenged - it is just a matter of time. The horse may be willing to stay and do as you ask until it is more than they care for, then they will let you know where you fit into the horse/human herd plan in some physical horse expression.

**Once a person has an idea of what they think they are, they have to learn to look at the horse for the reflection of what they are as the horse sees it.**

Funny how horses do that, and most people can eventually accept that, but



if another human was to tell them the same thing, they would tend to not accept such information as favourably. We don't always like the reflection we see because it is usually different than what we had thought. Horses don't lie or have any agenda, they live for the moment of comfort! Once a person has honestly identified what they are in the relationship, as a clinician, I have to assist them in behaving like a leader and not a submissive follower in ways that work for them.

# Training For Courage, cont'd

As an educator in a clinic setting, I have to consider the questions posed above and figure out where that participant is coming from, what they are comfortable expressing in their leadership and also their understanding of training principles and the horse's body language. Some techniques, however good, may not be that effective if a learning participant tries to be too much like the instructor (which might be impossible) as opposed to just being the best lead they can be. When teaching I do not want participants to feel like they need to be a Paul Dufresne clone. This is not healthy for these participants as they do not come to the learning environment with the same attributes and experience. The best thing I can do is to help people express themselves effectively, within their abilities, and help them modify their lead to their horse's needs in a way they can be successful.

It is my opinion that any good teacher of people or horses will take the time to feel out and test the student - whether equine or human - to see where they need help the most to be happy and safe in the partnership. Confidence is a big stumbling block and as a teacher we need to help people understand the horse so they know when the horse feels ok or not and how to cause it, when they are safe or not and how to stay there, and then how they can change the situation so it is positive for both of them. This is such a great opportunity to learn about understanding, knowing and improving ourselves. Give it some thought, and enjoy the journey in discovering yourself and your horse in becoming part of the herd.

*Paul Dufresne is a writer, performer, trainer and clinician in Kelowna, BC, who educates in Natural Horsemanship; Classical Arts; Liberty and Circensic Dressage. He teaches people to understand horses, but 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.*