

Identity Theft or Identify Crisis

Does your horse know who you are?

It is not a trailer loading problem. It is a problem of the will. However, the will is not free to really function (obey us) when it is carrying the burden of fear, defiance or confusion.

One horse says, "You expect me to get in that thing? I have no way of knowing what will happen to me in there. I'm scared, I'm not getting in." Another horse says, "You expect me to get in that thing? I don't care what you want; I don't do what I don't want to do. No, I'm not getting in."

The next horse says, "You expect me to get in that thing? You haven't demonstrated to me that you know what's really going on in other situations. Because you are confused about your own intentions and expectations, you have left me confused. No, I'm not getting in."

A horse cannot express his will in a constructive, deliberate and confident manner unless we answer his three questions: 1. What do I need to be afraid of? 2. What can I get away with? 3. What do you want?

We are focused on the trailer; the horse is focused on the way he regards the trailer and his opinion of us. We are focused on the tangible; he is focused on the intangible. He needs to have his questions answered. If we don't give a horse an honest answer to an honest question, there is no way he will really respect us or trust us.

When a horse asks that first question, he is looking for assurance and security. He needs our understanding and patience. Having said that, it is also true that we cannot let his reasons become excuses. He needs our leadership, which is really nothing more than wise management.

When a horse asks that second question, he is looking for authority that is solid and clear. He wants to know that you mean what you say. To be convinced of that, he will test and push. If he finds our leadership weak and wobbly, he will lose respect for us. We could call his dilemma an identity crisis. He's trying to identify our role in the relationship. He then will be able to identify his role, accept it, adopt and adapt to it as he understands it. He will have occasional questions. How we answer those questions will identify in his mind how we regard him. When the

first and second questions are answered, he is ready to ask the third one.

If we don't answer with clarity and confidence, we leave him hanging in limbo. Believe me, horses won't stay in limbo very long. If we fail him now, we will soon be heading back to square one. If we are clear in answering the third question, the horse is in a position and condition to cooperate and obey without a chip on his shoulder.

If these questions are not answered in the context of pre-trailer, trailer, post-trailer, there is going to be trouble in paradise. Flight is not possible and fight is not really necessary, so he'll take a third option — he'll tune out. That can take on various forms depending on the horse.

He is now having his own identity crisis. His handler couldn't identify what the real issues were or couldn't respond to the issues. The leader was lost, leaving the horse to identify what the handler couldn't or wouldn't. The horse is no mood or mode to make the choices (exercise his will) the handler wants.

As a foal, the horse made some unwise choices and got in trouble with his mother. From the very start, the foal learns obedience by suffering consequences. Cause and effect become his basic guidance system. The circumstances of his life become the context in which his point of view is formed. His existence is blessed or cursed depending on who owns him.

If he is owned by someone who is permissive and tentative, he has to deal with a human with an identity crisis. That person may have the best of intentions, but because true leadership is not understood, that horse-human relationship will be frustrated and could be dangerous. That owner cannot understand the cause-and-effect approach to horse handling. Pressure and release is only a mental concept. This person can't make it work because he or she is so afraid of hurting a horse's feelings that the person is for all practical purposes helpless and cannot positively engage the horse.

A horse that is owned by an insensitive, arrogant, wanna be cowboy has no hope of ever making a posi-

tive connection with that human. The connection will never be offered to him and he can't accept what isn't offered. He will search for a connection but, unable to find it, will abandon the search and struggle to make the best of a bad situation. He is wired to survive and survive he will, but somebody is going to pay a price.

Now, the arrogant handler may have enough skill to subdue the horse against the horse's will. There may even be a resemblance of civility but both horse and human are being cheated out of what could have been.

The permissive handler will be identified as gentle. The arrogant handler will be identified as rough. Some will conclude that the permissive handler got poor results because he or she was not rough. Not so. Some will conclude that arrogant handler got less than good results because he or she was not gentle. Not so. Neither knew or understood what was important to the horse, had little or no control of their emotions or were simply not able to turn their intentions into material the horse could process and get a grip on.

If the relationship turns chaotic, neither horse nor human are able or willing to identify the real issues that concern either. They are like two blind boxers going at each other. If it were not so tragic and unnecessary, it would be like listening to a basketball game on the radio except that the only comment made and made repeatedly would be "a swing and a miss." A home run would be a total fluke but statistically possible.

Let's take a look at an identity crisis in our modern terminology. A prime example is the term "horse breaking." That term is no longer used in the modern horse world because it carries implications and connotations that are disturbing.

In reality the breaking of horses is going on all the time. Just as we break a rock loose from the ground, we break a horse loose from his present point of view. Because he can't exist in a vacuum, he accepts our point of view. We break his will to resist us without breaking his spirit.

Breaking horses is not positive or negative because of *what* is done but *why*, *how* and *when* it is done. Whether we chase them in a round pen, pop them with white sticks or whatever else we choose to do to or with a horse, what really matters is whether we answer all their questions in a way that they can

understand and grasp. That is what breaks a horse loose so he can join our world.

When we say "green broke," "well broke" or just "broke," what do we mean? Tinkering with terminology changes nothing. It may simply amount to identity theft. When "breaking a horse" is negative, it is because what is done to or with the horse leaves no opportunity for the horse to consider and respond in a way that makes him a participant rather than a subject. A subject has been robbed of his power to choose. His will is rendered useless as far as his relationship with humans is concerned.

Today's interpretation or definition of the concepts of rough and gentle is another example of common mistaken identity. If I would be asked if I was rough or gentle, I would answer yes and no. In the first place, I would have no idea what you mean by the question, and very likely you would have little or no idea what I would mean by a detailed response.

The questions should be: Are you clear? Are you fair? Does the horse believe you and take you seriously? As long as the horse-owning public is distracted by mistaken or stolen identity of concepts, our horses will be the losers. Both horse and human suffer loss because clarity does not prevail. If your horse does not do what you want, when you want, how you want, and do it quietly and deliberately, there is identity crisis in the minds of both horse and human. To be fair or clear, stuff happens and things can get cloudy. That is not the issue. It is when the cloud doesn't go away that we have some real questions to answer.

If students raise their hands in class asking for help or clarification, the teacher should accommodate their request. A teacher who can't or won't should be fired. Our horses are raising their hands waiting for our acknowledgement and then for our clarification. Let's clear up our own identity issues so we can rightly identify the issues our horses struggle with. If the horse raises his hand in class, give him a nod, then listen and then answer.

We can't identify what we don't understand and the horse can't identify what we don't explain. If that happens, the horse will identify the absence of leadership. The human may want to be a leader but the horse will see it as mistaken or stolen identity — and no, he's not going to get in the trailer.

Just my opinion,

— Warren Bengtson