

# OPM, OPK and POK

*The importance of owning what you know.*

Most politicians start out with the best of intentions but eventually some of them get OPM disease (other people's money). We all know about the resulting chaos of fiscal irresponsibility and what we entrusted them to manage. Well, there is a parallel in a condition we'll call OPK syndrome (other people's knowledge).

When a child starts riding a bike it is less eventful and safer if the bike is equipped with training wheels. OPK provides training wheels for new horse owners. Reading, listening and watching will prevent many blind alleys and wrecks. Training wheels help the youngster learn balance and coordination without the fear of nasty spills.

However, there comes a point that training wheels begin to be a hindrance. They start catching on things and actually prevent the lean required for sharp turns. In the same way, OPK serves us well to a point. It gets us started, acquainted and somewhat organized in our horse-human relationship. We begin to notice however, that OPK is often contradictory and confusing.

The horse world is full of real and apparent contradictions. Vets, farriers, trainers and long time horse owners have many areas of disagreement. A good example would be trainers and their techniques and philosophies. They may use similar or identical terms and phrases but be very different in what they mean by what they say. They may use similar techniques but disagree on how their techniques should be implemented. To make matters worse, they all may give convincing arguments defending their positions.

So, now what do we do? Listen to everybody. Watch them like a hawk. Observe the subtleties and details of their body language. Is the horse getting bored with endless repetition or is he engaged and interested? Is what you are watching mechanical response or rational choice?

If your horse-human relationship is not what you want it is because you have not yet mastered what the training wheels help you learn or the training wheels have outlived their original purpose and now are actually a hindrance. When training wheels (OPK) become a problem, it is time for the next step.

OPK must become POK (personally owned knowledge).

If a horse is scared, defiant, or confused, something is not clear to him. We then must step back from the forest so we can see the trees. We then discover that stepping back from the trees reveals the forest. Somewhere, sometime and somehow, OPK has to melt away and become POK. As that transformation progresses, our horse-human relationship keeps improving and one day we realize that OPK has become POK.

It then occurs to us that our training wheels are gone and we are free to think for ourselves. If OPK does not direct us to thinking for ourselves it will become a set of oversized training wheels that will become a source of stress and limitation. It will prevent us from becoming who we are and from knowing our horse to be who he is.

Never become a zombie of a guru, that will always prevent OPK from becoming POK. Discarding our training wheels does not mean discarding what we learned with their help. We use what we learned as a basis for our future learning and growth.

OPK will carry the uniqueness of our teacher. As OPK becomes POK his or her uniqueness begins to give way to our POK, and we are free to make instant shifts and changes because the training wheels are gone but what we learned from them has expanded and conformed to who we are.

There is no one right way to regard and handle our horses. It is all opinion based on human personality, experience, and/or world view. Those are the variables. Everybody has access to the same facts. How we interpret and process those facts account for the differences among us. We sort through OPK and develop POK yet always open to the benefit of OPK. As POK develops it will get easier to critique OPK. The goal is to gain confidence without becoming arrogant.

How do we know if OPK has faded or blended into POK? It always comes back to those three questions our horses ask us.

1. What do I need to be afraid of?
2. What can I get away with?
3. What do you want?

When those questions are answered to a horse's complete satisfaction he will do what we want, how we want, and when we want. That is the simple formula for a stress free horse-human relationship. When the human's requests are reasonable, clear and consistent, a horse will have no problem responding quickly and quietly.

OPK can show you the mountain and teach you about it but only POK gets you climbing. OPK goes with us for a while and is a great help but after a while, the need to continue to ask OPK what we should do gets both tiresome and cumbersome. At that point we really start to develop POK. As a matter of fact, the best OPK will push us toward POK. Beware of OPK that insists tagging along indefinitely.

Our horses will trust and respect us the most when OPK has taken a back seat to POK. That is because we are more real which makes us more respectable. A horse doesn't care how knowledgeable we are, but he does care if the knowledge we have has become our own. How does he know? Because we are comfortable in our own skin and are no longer trying to wear someone else's. That will always result in a quiet spirit and steady body language which to the horse is very reassuring.

Crucial to the development of POK is learning to differentiate fear, defiance and confusion as manifested by the horse. It is common to mistake defiance or confusion for fear. It is often assumed that because the horse is a prey animal his uncooperative activity or attitude is always fear based. When that assumption is made, the confused horse doesn't get the instructions he needs and the defiant horse doesn't get the consequences he needs. The horse is treated as a victim and nothing gets solved or settled. It is then sometimes decided "that's just the way he is, I guess we'll have to live with it."

This is especially evident when farrier and horse meet. It is amazing that with all the OPK that is available now in the form of clinics, books and TV, people are still twitching and tranquilizing for farrier work. It apparently is assumed that horses are incapable of behaving and relaxing. Handlers assume that horses are not smart enough to behave or unable to relax without being drugged.

If clear choices are provided, the horse will work his own way into cooperation with human requirement.

Now, the problem with turning OPK into POK is there is a lot of conflicting philosophies to sort thru. You alone are responsible for making it all

come together to bring about a workable, pleasant, and stress free horse-human relationship. For that to happen, POK must be workable, functional, and stress free. If that is not the case your horse will not be impressed with your knowledge. He will know that your knowledge lacks understanding.

How do I know if my horse believes my knowledge really has understanding? If he will do what I want, how I want, when I want and do it quietly. POK has essentially three stages. First is the acquisition of that knowledge. Second is learning how it works. Third is becoming comfortable and at home in the outworking of that knowledge. When the horse is comfortable and at home with my handling, then I probably am functioning in stage three.

A stress-free horse-human relationship is the one certain indicator that POK has found a home in my heart and mind. That doesn't mean there will never be setbacks, surprises and maybe even disappointments. But it does mean that the unexpected, whether from the outside world or from within, will be challenges that are diagnosed and resolved quickly.

Surprises are almost impossible to deal with by way of OPK. Because surprises need to be handled instantly there is no time to consult OPK. Instant and effective responses can only come from POK.

The transfer of OPK to POK to SWK (smooth working knowledge) is often hindered by the fear of making mistakes. Mistakes cannot be eliminated from the knowledge transfer. That is a simple fact of life and should not be feared. However, mistakes can be minimized both in number and degree by handling horses that are within the scope of personal ability. Enough of a challenge to push us, but not so much that we either get hurt or discouraged or both.

It is never a good idea to drive a Ferrari if we are still having trouble with a wheelbarrow. Stay with "wheelbarrow" horses until the relationship is stress free. Both horse and human need to be set up for success not failure. For that to happen, our knowledge has to be powered by understanding.

Our horses will always be a little suspicious of us if they keep bumping into our training wheels. But that's better than us falling down and getting stepped on (figuratively). When our horses see that we no longer use training wheels (OPK) they will breathe a sigh of relief. To wind this up, I have a question. If you are a Christian does your Christianity consist of OPK or POK?

For what it's worth,

— Warren Bengtson