

True Horsemanship is A Place of Being, Before a Means of Doing!

By Elizabeth Graves ©2007



The author in a rare moment of relaxation, where else, but on the back of a horse, enjoying the backcountry of Montana.

For some, this article will make them feel uncomfortable, some will just not get it, but for others, it may be an opening to the door they have been looking for. That final piece that brings them to the place in which the special bond between horse and human makes that connection in which their learning together is mutual, clarified and mature.

Open any dictionary and one can find a few different definitions for the word

“Horsemanship”. It is described as ‘skilled in managing horses’, ‘the art of equitation’, or ‘skilled in the riding and care of horses’. These simple descriptions actually cover an awful lot of territory when it comes to learning all that is involved in caring for, teaching and the art of riding horses.

It's easy for people to fool themselves...,
but one never fools the horse.

The Lessons

THESE ARE TIMES IN WHICH BILLIONS OF dollars are generated through the horse

community annually. (The American Horse Council estimates the horse industry has a direct economic effect on the U.S. of \$39 billion annually!) Never before have we seen it develop into an industry with more flashy marketing, struggling for positions of control and power than we do now. This can be confusing (in some cases *meant* to be so) for the new horse owner trying to start out on the right path to developing good horsemanship. People can feel stuck in this big wheel spinning around them; enough to stop them from their first good intentions of owning a horse. The clearest path for horse owners is to be true to those first good intentions and be true to the horses they own.

The true horseman always remembers he or she is a student first and foremost, no matter how many years he or she has been working with horses. He or she must also be aware he or she is not only a student of other humans, but also the student of the horse.

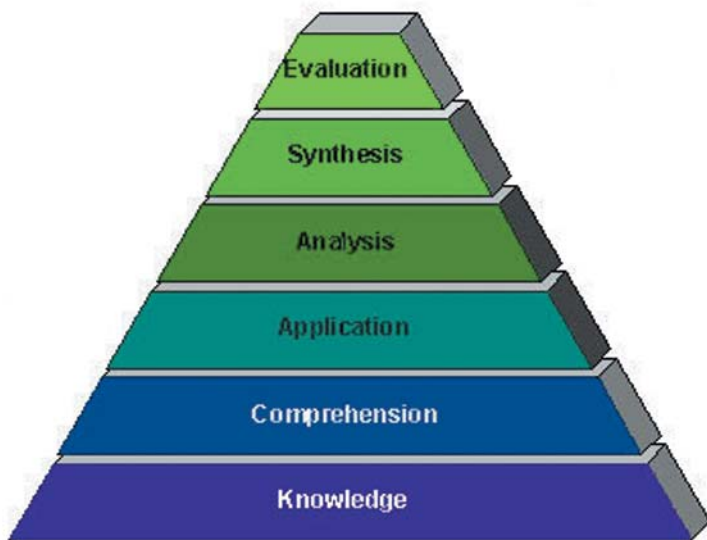
No matter in what way, or at what age, we come to be owners and teachers of the horse, everyone starts at ground zero. People have an advantage over the horse, though, in that they have many avenues in which to learn about their subject. The horse does not have this; each and every horse experiences and learns one human at a time, be it good, bad or both. The horse is also 100% dependent on us for every aspect of its life.

We As Students

IN LEARNING HORSEMANSHIP THERE ARE what is termed “Surface Workers” with phases of levels graduating to the “Deep Workers”. All people start as Surface Workers and many will remain Surface Workers, only ever

working in level 1 or 2, with some going on to 3 and 4, while the Deep Workers progress onto levels 5 and 6.* (See illustration.)





Blooms Levels of Learning

1. **Knowledge** - See, repeat, do, with the ability to regurgitate information.
2. **Comprehension** - Reason of why, understand why, but without relationships.
3. **Application** - Apply and expand to different situations, link to other information.
4. **Analysis** - Break a problem in to pieces to clarify. Can work to solutions.
5. **Synthesis** - Bring pieces of information together to form a whole. Can make linkages among concepts
6. **Evaluation** - Make judgments, select the best use of information and most importantly, *care why*.

***Based on Bloom's Taxonomy: BLOOM B S (ed.) (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the classification of educational goals - Handbook I: Cognitive Domain New York: McKay*

We As Teachers

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A HUMAN STUDENT IN BECOMING THE TEACHER IS TO GUIDE THE growth of the horse as a student - to teach a horse to be proficient in its work and to guide mental and physical development. The teacher has an obligation to teach with honesty and to be dependable and responsible for the needs of a horse. This also entails to improve, refine and bring a horse to its final form in all that it learns.

Surface Workers

IT IS VERY EASY FOR PEOPLE TO GET CAUGHT UP IN CULTURAL POWER STRUGGLES, WHICH can keep an individual from liberating their faith and achieving the higher levels of being a student and learning about the horse - and themselves.

Often the loudest voice, flash, flair and money bring followers/students rather than independent thinkers in learning. **Just because a majority may do something one way does not mean it is always the right direction to take for the best interest and well being of the horse**, but certain trends seem to feed the needs of the human at every turn. They "get results". The surface worker tends to desire just the end results; the finer points of quality are missed. They are happy just that a result happens.

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Artist, Liz Graves; photo by Kailah Hart

An original painting by the author reveals her deep sense of connection with the emotions of the horse.

Common behavior and work patterns of Surface Workers include:

- ❖ Consider the physical aspect of the horse only.
- ❖ Place human behaviors and emotions on the horse.
- ❖ Cover fears with ego.
- ❖ Can become aggressive in working with the horse.
- ❖ Look more often for the mechanical means to work with the horse.
- ❖ Blame others and/or horse for the lack of successful results.
- ❖ Tend to be more 'takers' and 'users' of the horse, while not meeting fully the needs of the horse.
- ❖ Works within the confines of control and /or conquer.
- ❖ Has a difficult time leaving personal emotions and baggage outside the teaching venue.
- ❖ More often makes short-term plans in teaching.
- ❖ Starts with being bigger with themselves and their aids, working to becoming smaller or softer as training progresses.
- ❖ Directs the body to get to the mind. Misinterprets having a relationship.
- ❖ Uses domination through intimidation and/or fear, or begs through bribery of the horse.
- ❖ Teaches as though every horse must work with in a pre set specific program with no thoughts to variables in an individual learning needs.

The Deep Workers

IN ORDER TO ARRIVE AT WHAT YOU ARE AS A DEEP WORKER, YOU MUST GO THROUGH THE WAY IN WHICH YOU ARE NOT FIRST. THAT'S A loaded sentence, but it's the whole point.

Without trust in yourself there can be no true belief in what you are and what you do. The Deep Worker always has a comfortable softness, is never posed, but just comfortable in his or her own skin. Deep Workers don't give one the impression that they are working; they just are, and know what it is to 'just be'. Deep Workers are conscious of their strengths and weakness. They do not feel ego over strengths or defeat in weakness, but an acceptance in knowing a balance of both, and know to work through both.

Common behavior and work patterns of Deep Workers include:

- ❖ Knows they themselves are the biggest tool they have with which to communicate with the horse.
- ❖ Don't need gadgets and gimmicks to achieve success with the horse.
- ❖ See each horse as a separate individual and approaches teaching each as such.
- ❖ Guides and directs the horse.
- ❖ Makes it easy for the horse to do the right thing.
- ❖ Never puts a time limit on a horse's progression, but takes the time it takes.
- ❖ Does not get greedy.
- ❖ Is perceptive, sympathetic and insightful in working with the horse.
- ❖ Understands long terms plans in teaching and its progression towards advanced work.
- ❖ Starts smaller with aids and only gets bigger if necessary.
- ❖ Works through trust to get to the mind first to then direct the body.
- ❖ Knows what a real relationship entails with a horse.

- ◆ Knows how to work through the place of compromise when needed for a horse.
- ◆ Works within the natural instincts the horse.
- ◆ Recognizes self-preservation in a horse.
- ◆ Sees and works within individuals limits of pressure.

It's So Easy, But It's So Hard

THERE ARE SO MANY CHOICES WE MUST MAKE AND ARE responsible for in being the student and teacher of the horse. Life's pressures can make this very hard.

It's easy to want to be a part of the human crowd to fulfill our own needs, to fit in and be accepted in some circles. Unfortunately, one result of this is that it's common for folks to not take responsibility for the choices they make, and put the blame of poor choices somewhere else.

Doing the right thing is easy. So it's hard for me to understand why people often take the path that seems easier in the beginning, but has a short-term vision, rather than spending more time to be truly good at something and have the complete experience with good results. This is as true in developing horsemanship and success in the horse's total education as it is with anything. Yes, at times the right path can be lonely, but a trip well worth it. We, just as the horses do, need to learn to live with ourselves. We interact better with others, and the horse, in learning this very important lesson in self-growth.

At times one may experience character assassination (by others) for choosing a deeper method. It's so foreign to many people and will remain so, by their choice. It can be a very uncomfortable place for folks to go, in that they have to look at themselves for change and growth. It's easy for some people to fool themselves and others into believing they are at a higher level of horsemanship than they are, but one never fools the horse. The horse, in its behavior and performance, is very revealing as to what we are.

For those who fail with horses it's easy to get rid of the evidence, that's why so many horses are sold, or killed.

If you are truly comfortable with and following the right path for the horse, then you should never feel or have the need to defend your methods. Others around you may, in rather creative ways, try to cover the personal threat they feel from the Deep Worker. Don't take it personally, just know it and recognize it for what it is, a weakness in those individuals.

The path of true horsemanship is a much bigger place for the horse and the human where both count, both receive, and both achieve. Trust in one's self and knowing at the end of the day you have to decide who you are. The horse will always know.



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Cloud
Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang

Overall size 22' x 28' - Image size 15' x 20'

From an original photograph by wild horse photographer, Lynne Pomeranz, comes this beautiful portrait printed on a heavy acid free, archival paper with a satin finish.

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