

MINDING MANNERS

Cover
feature



Julia Felton explains why respect is a two way street

We all want a horse who is respectful of our space and who behaves well, is easy to catch, shoe, ride and generally look after, but have you ever stopped to think how you are impacting your horse's behaviour? How do you show up on a daily basis? Do you appreciate that the consistency or otherwise of your actions has a direct influence on the behaviour of your horse? Since how you interact with your horse is a mirror of how you behave with other people, your horse can give you some clear signals of how you are creating respect with others.

WHAT IS RESPECT?

Respect is often an elusive quality that many people profess to want and yet few can articulate what it really is. The dictionary defines respect as 'a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements.' So, in essence, respect is something that is earned. It is earned by how you behave with others and is not something you can command.

You simply cannot demand that your horse respects you if you don't respect him. Respect is a two way street.

Let me explain this further. An individual must work hard at earning respect from others and you achieve this by living an honest and honourable life. You do what you say you will do, you are consistent in your actions and you have integrity. You say what needs to be said and always act from a place of truth and authenticity. You are dependable, solid and do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, even when it might be challenging. Respect comes when someone else interacts with and experiences these wonderful attributes and honours them with the gift of their respect. It's a two way street because one person gives their best and in return they receive the gift of other's best. Plain and simple. So if you want your horse's respect you need to give him your respect.

Respect starts from the inside out. You have to be able to respect yourself before you can expect others to respect you.

If you don't trust and respect yourself then no-one else will. Our moral fibre is defined by how much respect we have for ourselves and how much we trust our abilities. If you don't feel you deserve respect then in my experience you will never receive it. Some horse owners, for a multitude of different reasons, don't have high self esteem and belief in their own abilities, they don't lead themselves and therefore it is not surprising that their horses doesn't respect them or follow them. The net result is that the horse is branded as not having good manners. Yet why would he be respectful of you if you are not respectful of yourself?

EARN YOUR HORSE'S RESPECT

Assuming that you have learned to respect yourself first then a great way to develop respect with your horse is to ensure you always respect your horse's personal space. Just like humans, horses have boundaries which define their personal space and these can be flexible. Sometimes your horse might like you to be close to him and sometimes he might

Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners

Laurence Sterne

prefer you to be further away. Yet all too often we never give our horse a choice in that decision. We march into his personal space with little consideration for what he thinks about it. Remember we earn our horse's respect by our actions, so being mindful of where his personal space is is imperative in showing him that we care.

THE PERSONAL SPACE RULE

Horse's space

Your space

This rule states that you always and only have the right to conduct the behaviour of others in regard to your personal space. If your horse enters your personal space then you get to shape the interaction, as the horse must respect your space. Conversely, if you are in your horse's personal space you cannot influence his behaviour unless he invites you to. You need to respect his personal space and act accordingly.

This has massive consequences for how we catch our horses. Just think about it. If you walk into your horse's personal space you have no right to put the halter on him because you have entered his personal space. However, if your horse comes into your space then you have permission to put the halter on. This is why my horses always catch me.

As the respected leader of your horse you must always be aware how your horse feels about his personal space when you approach him. You must always ask permission to get closer to him when he is respecting your personal space and keeping an eye on you.

A DISRESPECTFUL HORSE

Even though you have earned your horse's respect by being

mindful of his personal space, there will come a time when he becomes disrespectful of your personal space. This happens in all relationships and it is just part of the natural evolution and ebb and flow of all relationship development. It's never personal.

Just think about it. When you first enter into any relationship both parties usually enter into the relationship respecting each other. You both dance with each other while establishing the ground rules for the relationship. Then, at some point, one person pushes the other person's boundaries and the other person has to decide how to respond. You either respond and let them know that their behaviour was unacceptable, or you allow it. The only challenge is that if you allow the behaviour then the other person persists and soon you find that your relationship is out of balance. You are no longer in an equal partnership but rather one person, consciously or unconsciously, dominates the other. The same can happen with your horse. If you don't address the situation when your horse pushes your boundaries you can find yourself in a situation where your horse no longer respects you.

THE REMEDY

We use the natural instincts of a horse, of course. All animals in nature experience the loss of territory in social interactions and it is what builds their character and social behaviour to be respectful and fit in and be responsible in the community. Lead horses gain the respect of dominant horses by catching them off guard and driving them off the territory on which they were grazing. When the lead horse does this, the dominant horse becomes more respectful because his lack of consistent action in paying attention meant he was not keeping the herd safe



and therefore he did not earn the respect of the rest of the herd.

You can achieve the same result by surprising your horse and initiating his flight response by taking his territory. This creates respect and raises your position in the pecking order enabling you to gain the right of passage to be accepted in the horse world as a respected leader.

A DISRESPECTFUL HUMAN

Unfortunately your horse often doesn't have a voice when his boundaries are disrespected. When he seeks to give you feedback he is just branded as being a naughty, disobedient horse. Next time you find that your horse is not being respectful and minding his manners I urge you to stop, breathe deeply and look at what you are doing that has created this situation.

Everything in nature works on the law of cause and effect which states that absolutely everything happens for a reason and that for every outcome or effect in one's life, there is a specific cause. This is why respect is always a two way street.

Julia Felton partners with horses to help business owners develop leadership, teamwork and communication skills
www.businesshorsepower.com