



FLIGHT OR FIGHT

Horses will choose one or the other, and I hope they choose the latter as I can work with a horse that offers me movement over a horse that decides he sees me as the enemy and needs to fight.

If horses feel pressured, trapped, scared or threatened, they will react in either one of these ways.

I see our job as a horse trainer, and yes, that's you! (If you own a horse, you are a trainer) to build the horses confidence. Help them view us as a GOOD LEADER, so when the horse finds himself in one of these places, he will look to us for direction.

Now, this does not mean if the horse is feeling a little worried that we need to love on him a little more and reassure his fears, but there are ways we can help him handle his emotions and help him come out the other side a little braver and feeling, I can do this!

I will give you an example: while giving a young boy a riding lesson, his pony was distracted; he felt insecure in the riding arena by himself; he could hear his paddock buddies but could not see them. The young rider was becoming anxious; the pony was becoming uneasy, and trouble was looming. I asked the child's Mum to bring the other horse to the nearby yard to see each other; we continued with our riding lessons but added little rest breaks standing at the far end of the arena.

The horse received rest and reward for being away from the horse, quickly learning to control its emotions while rapidly figuring out that his feet had to keep moving when he approached the near side of the arena where his buddy was standing.

The following week when I returned, we were able to move the horse's further apart until finally, the horse did not need his buddy anymore; he felt safe listening to the aids of the rider.

In Cowboy Dressage, riders can have a buddy horse stand outside the court in one of the far corners and support the horse and rider while riding their tests. I love this idea; as a Judge, I have seen this in action, calm and confident riders having fun building partnerships and exemplary leadership with their horses.

I have also heard comments like the horse needs to get over himself and learn to be there without another horse; yes, he probably does. Still, just like it is our responsibility as a parent to train our children to be independent and go through this life with skills and confidence, as opposed to fear and intimidation, I see horse training as no different.

So I see it as my responsibility to do the same for the horses in my care. Being a good leader takes a whole lot of work. One of my mentors once said that working with horses teaches us a lot about ourselves, and I agree. I think they are our best mirrors and teachers.

My daughter said to me the other day while we talked and gave examples on a particular topic, you always bring things back to horses. Thinking, yes, I do! But I am with them every day; I cannot begin to tell you over the last 40 years what life lessons they have taught me and how they have been my counsellors.

There are many ways to achieve your goal without provoking the flight or fight. What will you choose, Smarter and Wiser or Go Hard?