

Horsetalk

A vision of horse and rider moving as one

By JILL MURPHY

As I recuperate from my shoulder surgery last Thursday, I'd like to share some more words of wisdom about Natural Horsemanship from my friend and neighbor, Kyle Van Splinter.

'To achieve successful horsemanship, compassionate leadership is crucial.'

I am fascinated by the way that everything old is new again. This approach to horsemanship can be called by a different name, but it is how Alexander the Great worked with Bucephalus, so that rider and horse moved as one. It is the same way Kyle connects with her mares. Here are her further thoughts on the topic.

When a herd of horses runs, the horses become an energized cohesive unit. The vision is to become so connected with a horse that you're moving together as one. That's why I call my Natural Horsemanship instruction, "We move as One." For me, moving in harmony as a herd of two is the absolute ideal, whether connected by a lunge line, at liberty, or in the saddle.

The first time I experienced moving as one took place several years ago with Firenzé. If you get the pressure, release and timing right, horses will mirror you. They will actually match what you are doing. I decided to try using this concept to teach Firenzé to reach, stretch and lift her back. While lunging, I started reaching, stretching and lifting my back to emulate what I'd like her to do. It took awhile, but all of a sudden she attempted a try. I immediately rewarded her with a gigantic release: I actually dropped to



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Kyle Van Splinter riding Firenzé.

the ground. Firenzé looked at me in a way that said she couldn't believe what she saw; she is a very sensitive horse and appreciates a well-timed release from pressure. She then couldn't stop trying for me and checking in to see if I noticed. To this day when I lunge her, Firenzé offers the stretch and then checks to see if I'm watching.

Every horse has a different innate personality, different lifetime experiences, as well as previous good or bad training. I don't ever think of horses as behaving badly. They're just reacting to their basic need for

safety and, to a lesser extent, their need for comfort, relaxation or pleasure, or they're confused about what's being asked of them.

In order to be rewarded with trust from a horse, that horse must respect you and see you as a good leader. Horses challenge our leadership for different reasons and may not trust us. Some have an innate desire to be the leader and other horses, like Firenzé, test us because they need to find the best leader possible to feel safe. To achieve successful horsemanship, compassionate leadership is crucial.

To capture We move as One moments with a horse, it's necessary to start with the lightest of aids, ideally starting with energy and then escalating from there with more physical aids. This approach makes sense to horses, as they themselves communicate with energy first and then escalate to more physical body language that may intensify even to a kick or a bite. While stepping up the communication, a horse's energy also continues to match its physical language. Using energy within ourselves is a difficult thing to accomplish. However, once you achieve it and use it appropriately, the horse respects you as they would an equine leader.

And, while in the saddle, horses respond to energy and light aids. My GiGi is a confident horse and isn't afraid of trying something new. So, when she was very young, I thought I'd ask for a trot by employing a two-beat rhythm in my core along with some heightened energy. She got it! I was thrilled. Present day, I virtually never have to use leg for upward transitions.

After my students grasp the Natural Horsemanship mindset, I teach them to employ some physical techniques, which they use to achieve some degree of leadership with their horses. I help them become aware of, and assist them in accessing, appropriate energies within themselves. Not only will I, but their horses will also let the students know if they're correct with their energies and intentions.

I love seeing people succeed with leadership and energy and watching the questioning look their horses give them. It's almost as if the horse is saying: "You get me and speak my language. What can I do for you?" That's when the We move as One ideal begins.

For more information on Natural Horsemanship, call Kyle at 845-598-0069 or visit facebook.com/WemoveasOne.Kyle.