



Danee's Horsemanship Hints...

Ground Manners

Ground manners are not something you work on occasionally- they are how you handle your horse every day for mundane tasks such as leading to and from pasture, grooming, feeding, cleaning the horse's stall with him in it, haltering and unhaltering, etc. We often lead horses six at a time to and from the pasture and people are always impressed, but if your horses all know to walk when you walk, stop when you stop, maintain personal space, and to not eat grass without permission then leading a large number of horses is quite easy- you just hold the end of the lead ropes and walk.



Every day we ask the horses to drop their heads to be haltered. They must tip their nose toward us and keep their head down until the halter is completely on and adjusted. Teaching this to new horses that come in is absolutely time consuming, but within a week they are dropping their head into the halter. It sure makes that horse easy to bridle later.

During feed time horses are not rewarded for banging the feed tub or rushing the door. I am not going to say the barn is quiet at feed time, but each horse must back away while their hay or grain is being placed and we do not move out of the horse's way until he is patient and respecting our space.

If we end up cleaning stalls while the horses are in, we tell the horse where to stand and expect him to stay there. He is not to lean his head out the door or to sniff the muck tub. He isn't allowed to stand in the middle hogging up our work space. We always position the horse so that we have a straight route to the doorway. This is both a safety factor and a time saver. I will often use my elbow or the top of the pitchfork handle to block the horse from turning his head into a space I now he wants to move into- I don't make contact with either, but I create a 'wall' of personal space to block him from moving out of whichever corner I placed him in.

When grooming, taking up, untacking, or whatever, we do not use crossties, but instead teach every horse to ground tie. We simply toss the lead on the ground out in front of the horse where he is not likely to step on it and every time he moves a step we simply put him back. In crossties the horse often evades by swinging his hindquarters away from us, but since he is tied and can only go so far we just take another step or two to catch up and go about our business without ever fixing the evasion. The horse leans on the crossties and then we wonder why he is heavy in our hands when riding or even leading. Make it the horse's responsibility to stand where he is told and once he learns the lesson, trust him enough to not cling to the lead rope- he will appreciate it.

These little handling tips create a horse that understands rules and follows them diligently. He will be easy to ride and loved by your vet and farrier. Take the time to create a horse that is easy to live with.

www.RudyHorsemanship.com

Like this article? Share it on Facebook!