



Tim first establishes leadership with his horse, Austin, using a rope working from the ground.

EILEEN SHANAHAN

Tim Hayes

Being a Good Leader is Natural

Long Island native and clinician Tim Hayes acknowledges and uses the words that are often associated with the natural horsemanship way of thinking. He talks about pressure-release, relationships, mutual respect, alpha horses, and using the language of the horse. But Tim cuts through the limitations of words and concepts to the heart of why this philosophy works.

Horses Don't Ride Other Horses

"Everything that horses do in their lives with humans is based on their self-preservation," Tim explains. "For them to do what we ask, in their mind, their survival has to be considered. The horse has to trust that when you ask him to do something, you are looking out for his best interest and his survival. The only way to do that is through communication that he will understand. So we need to start our relationship naturally, just like other horses do, on the ground. I like to say, you never see horses riding other horses."

Using Body Language

"Being on the ground and interacting, whether it's a hundred horses or just two, that's what's natural," Tim says. "They communicate with their body language; their ears, their tails, their kicking, their bucking, their rearing, their biting—that's how they relate to each other. Now that doesn't mean the human has to kick and buck and bite, but we have to simulate the body language with our tools and our ropes and halters so that we can become the alpha with our horse...not using pain, not using fear, not using intimidation. [When you do this], it becomes joyful

for both of you because the horse says, 'Hey! You know what? You're a lot better than you smell.'"

I Choose a Leader Who Will Look Out for Me

"Humans pick a leader," Tim says, "because they want a leader to look out for them. That's basically it! [A horse may ask] 'Will you take care of me? Are you my leader? Do you have wisdom beyond mine? Do you have strength beyond mine? Do you have patience beyond mine? Do you have confidence beyond mine? If you don't, then I don't need you. You have to be better than me and wiser than me in certain ways.'

"It's the same whether it's a horse or a human," Tim says. "[But] since horses judge each other on their ability to move each other around; that's how they choose their leader. We want to replicate that in our relationship with the horse."

Leadership Qualities

"Leadership qualities are the same in horses as they are in humans," he continues. "These are honesty, fairness, character, dignity, confidence, wisdom, and kindness. These are the things we want in a parent, or a leader. And this is what a horse wants.

When we have those things, we feel very safe and comfortable following this leader."

The Females are Often the Best Leaders

"A lot of people think that the leader of the herd will always be a stallion," Tim explained, "when in fact the leader of the herd is most often the old mare. She's been there the longest. She's been there twenty years. She's seen it all. She's heard it all. She's the best at seeing and knowing danger and being able to separate false alarms from reality. So when you see a herd of thirty horses out on the pasture, and there's a big noise, the horses don't look at the noise. They look at the alpha horse, which is often the old mare. If she doesn't lift her head, but keeps eating, they'll just go back to eating."

Horseplay to Determine the Leader

"The number one priority for horses for millions of years is to avoid being a dinner for predatory animals. The way that they survive is by running and they do that by having four feet, four legs, and a powerful motor. Whoever controls the movement of the horse is the more respected member of the group. So when a stallion is moving a herd around, he will keep them in line by circling the herd, pinning his ears, or by going after a horse that's not where he's supposed to be. He may be biting him or giving him a dirty look. He's controlling the movement of the herd.

"Now when you watch horses play, you'll see that it is a question of who can make who move first. Two horses may be facing off, biting back and forth, back and forth. The game is to see who's going to give up first. Finally one horse does yield and walk away. Now if one horse gets the other to move, he wins. He's the leader. It's horseplay!"

Comfort vs. Discomfort

"Before people started using the terms pressure and release of pressure, in horse talk it was physical and emotional comfort and discomfort," Tim said. "When I teach people how to communicate in the horse's natural language, when I say that horses communicate with body language, touch, and feel, that means that horses ask questions and give answers with their bodies, whether by touching or by dealing with space between themselves and other horses.

"When a horse wants another horse to do what they say, in order to establish the alpha role, they play what we can call dominance games with each other. They don't intimidate or try to hurt or frighten one another. To me, 'dominating' means influencing in a fair way by getting the other horse to move. The way they do that is by administering levels of comfort and discomfort, both physical and emotional.

"The wonderful thing about horses communicating is that they give each other three opportunities [for compliance] before they 'raise their voice,' or 'make contact.' For example, if a horse wants another horse to move out of his space, the first thing he'll do is pin his ears. He's saying, 'Hey buddy. If I were you, I'd move away.' If the other horse doesn't move, they'll maybe turn and lift a leg. If the other horse still doesn't move, they might kick out, but they'll just kick the air.

"So now there have been at least three attempts to get the other horse to move. If all that fails, then he'll make contact. And, because that's uncomfortable, the other horse will probably move away. That's the pressure and the release of pressure. The ears, the leg, and the lifting, is pressure. The moment the horse moves away, all that stuff stops."

Boundaries and Safety

"Because horses are of equal size—a thousand pounds, seven feet long, five feet high, they can do this kind of communication, including kicking and biting, without destroying the other horse. But when a human comes in to establish himself as the alpha horse and establishes this type of communication, he has to make the horse understand that he's not like another horse. This is why the first thing I teach as part of groundwork is how to be safe and how to establish boundaries that your horse respects. Even though you are communicating in the same language, he cannot bite or kick you.

"When we learn the concept of comfort and discomfort and we have asserted ourselves as 'alpha', the horse will say 'Hey, you're terrific!'

"Once we get this on the ground, then when you finally sit on their back to ride, you've worked out the relationship. You don't have a horse that is going to buck, kick, rear, or run away with you, because he looks to you with respect, as his leader. It's a lot better to have it worked out on the ground before you ever get on."

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**Horses in the Age of
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"I like to say we live in an age of partial attention," Tim said. "Nobody's present in their own life...with the cell phones and the computers and the voice mails. Horses are such a wonderful way to get us back into the moment because they live in the moment. They connect to nature. They embody the very qualities that we as humans aspire to. Horses are kind, fair, honest...They're patient. They're tolerant. They have all these terrific qualities that my mother told me I should have.

"It's so beautiful to work with horses once you understand what [and how] they're communicating. Tom Dorrance used to say, 'the horse is never wrong. Everything that he does makes perfect sense.' Once you see that the horse is never wrong, then...I have to say that it must be something I have to change in myself.

"The horse can teach me to be kinder, or teach me to be gentler.

He can teach me to be more honest. Something I discovered years ago was that if I can be better, then I can get my horse to be better. The way I get better is to copy my horse. So in order to be a better human, I need to be a better horse.

About Tim

A New York City native, Tim felt inexplicably drawn to horses through a series of events, starting with a promising career in psychology, leading to a livelihood in the film-making industry, which opened the door to time spent with a family in Idaho where he learned to rope and ride. "The first time I got on a horse, I was forty-eight years old," Tim says. "I fell so in love with it

that I decided that I really wanted to learn about it."

Now years later, having studied with many of the world's master horsemen and living on Long Island, Tim teaches classes, writes articles, and does clinics in the Northeast.

If you wish to contact Tim or learn more about him, visit www.hayesisforhorses.com. 📞



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