

Tracy Porter

Article

CONSISTENCY

By Tracy Porter

What is consistency? Well to me it's knowing that when it's 90 degrees outside I will be sweating and I probably won't regret not wearing my insulated riding pants. For billions and billions of burger eaters, it's knowing that when you pull into a McDonalds, you know what's on the menu and what it will taste like no matter where you are in the world! Wow, isn't that a delightful thought? Consistency means it stays the same. If one day we tell kids that it's okay to swear and throw rotten tomatoes at elderly people and the next day we say that it isn't, then we're not being very consistent in our teaching!

Our relationship with our horse is directly effected by our consistency. Consistency begins with the basics of horse care; feeding, deworming, vaccinations, how often we see our horse and what we expect of them in terms of manners work etc. Consistency effects the horse's performance. Remember our horse is a mirror image of us. Their strong points are ours as are their weaknesses.

Consistently teaching the wrong behavior: Recently a man said his friend was buying a new horse. The friend doesn't ride often or very long and he's tired of his horse (Arab) jiggling and prancing on the trail. He rides with spurs and is constantly bumping his horse with them, he then has to hold his horse in, since it wants to take off. He routinely remarks that he likes how pretty his horse is. But in the next breath that he wished he would follow nicely in line with the rest of the group, instead of out to the side. He has noticed the other horses are quiet. He figures that's because they aren't Arabs, they're Quarter Horses! So he buys a quiet Quarter Horse. Unless the man changes his ways, he will soon have a jiggling and prancing, not quiet Quarter Horse. Horses are a mirror image of us, good or bad.

The formula for improving your horse's performance:

1. Handler/Rider Concentration: Being able to concentrate regardless of outside distractions. We won't get consistent unless we concentrate.
2. Handler/Rider Consistency: Sending the same signals over and over to the horse. Essential for horse to learn.
3. Horse Consistency: After the rider has been consistently sending signals, the horse will begin to respond correctly to them.
4. Horse Concentration (also known as Horse's Attention!) The horse has developed a pattern of waiting for a request from the handler. He begins to think back to the rider with his attention being directed toward the handler and less and less to the outside world.

Many times riders complain that their horse isn't concentrating or paying attention. They're distracted that their horse isn't paying attention, thus are distracted by the distraction. They're not focusing on what they want their horse to do or learn. Instead they should focus on what they are trying to teach the horse, next will come the horse's performance and long after that, the horse give his attention to us.

When we do have our horse's attention, we can't suddenly decide to sightsee or begin chatting up a storm with someone else or the horse isn't going to be there for us. He is going to get tired of mentally waiting and move on. Have you been talking to someone only to know that their attention is elsewhere? I have, it makes me feel unimportant. I'd like to kick him in the shins and say HEY! I'm talking to you buddy! Another example: Whenever Golden Child (my brother, Mark) comes home, my mother's attention suddenly is riveted upon his gleaming presence. Maybe this is because she takes me for granted as I'm always there and my attention is available at her beckoned call. Or it could be since I am always there, my attention is not such a hot commodity! I guess I need to be selective! Before you think I am really unbalanced, I just like to tease her about Golden Boy, I really harbor no grudges as you will find out in my next book *Holding Grudges and Getting Even*. The bottom line is if we want our horse's attention, we must give them our attention.

When is it okay for the horse to eat grass? Here when we are stopping along the trail, or Oh, no, not now when we are trying to take his picture on the lush lawn. When is it okay to for the horse to pull on the lead rope? Here, when we are busy chatting with someone and he starts to fidget or no, not now when he is dragging us trying to get back with his buddies. When is it okay for the horse to put his head up? When we halter, lead him or deworm him, but not when we are bridling him. We expect that the horse should KNOW when a situation does or doesn't count. To the horse, the halter is the same as the bit and the signals we send do mean something. If sometimes when he pulls we release, but at other times we wait for him to give through the pull one can only imagine how confusing we are to the horse! Since the horse's learning capability is less than kindergarten work, we really can appreciate the horse for trying when we the smart species aren't being very consistent in our own behavior.

The neat thing is that the horse can always be an A student depending how we present the material to him! But it is up to us to lay the foundation work and stick to it 100% of the time. Only then can we expect our horse to be perfect 100% of the time.



Rewards can come in many forms-But it has to be there to give him a reason to keep trying. A rub on his face or a release of the rein lets Thomas know that he's on the right track!



It's too hard for Caz to decide when I won't mind him taking "5" to chow. At another time we will be riding through a cornfield... and he'll wonder "why...was it okay then?...but now it's not!"

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