

What's the difference between partnership and relationship?

by Charles Wilhelm

Question: The question I have been asked is the difference between partnership and relationship. There are two schools of thought but I think it is a matter of semantics.

Answer: Partnership conjures up a notion that there is harmony between you and your horse. We certainly want to accomplish this but we live by words and communicate by words and horses live by actions. If you look up the word partnership in the dictionary it says "a state of having a partner, of participation involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities." The translation is that when you are in a partnership with someone, that individual has an opinion and input.

If you understand horse dynamics, you know that if you have 30 horses, you can have up to 29 leaders. They always establish a chain of command or pecking order. Anytime a horse has an opinion it is usually a behavior that we do not want. This may be kicking, biting, rearing, pushing, pawing, or other aggressive behavior. Although these are natural behaviors and all horses are born with these behaviors, they are dangerous.

A relationship is a connection between two individuals. You can have a connection with your horse and that is what we aspire to, both on the ground and in the saddle. The connection is when you are the leader. It need not be demonstrated by force but it is accomplished by controlling the horse's feet. When you control the feet, you control the mind and that is how you establish the relationship.

Part of establishing a relationship is putting in the time with your horse, and the process of earning your horse's trust. If you have a horse that is pushy, rude, tries to walk over or drag you, kicks at you when you pick up a foot, paws with impatience at the tie bar or bangs the stall door to get fed, you have a partner expressing his opinion, resulting in unwanted behaviors. This is

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not a good relationship with your horse because the horse is demanding to be the leader. The result is usually that the human will get hurt.

You want to look at the connection with your horses as a relationship where you are the leader. If you treat the horse as a horse, you will find that special connection and have the special relationship that we all dream about. Many of us, including myself, grew up with Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and pictures of horses running down a beach with manes and tails flying, riding without bridle or saddle on a horse that has never been ridden before. Those are romantic fairy tales and while we want the same feeling these stories give us, we really need an obedient, safe horse that respects our space. Once we have established leadership and respect with our horse, then we can have the horse of our dreams.

You want a relationship with your horse and not a partnership. Only in our fantasy do we get an equal partnership. In reality, we need a relationship, built on time, trust, ups and downs and a lot of hard work.

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