



Do You Dominate or Intimidate Your Horse?

By Tim Hayes

Having a good relationship with your horse and being successful in any discipline, whether it's Jumping, Trail Riding or Dressage requires leadership. To ride in true harmony without resistance a rider must become a respected and trusted leader for his horse. Most people are taught that to become the leader they need to intimidate their horse ("Show the horse who's boss"). This is what I refer to as "Traditional Horsemanship".

Alternatively "Natural Horsemanship" teaches us to become our horses' leader using dominance. Dominance is how horses control each other naturally whether it's the stallion of the herd or the mother of a foal. The difference and the results it produces are remarkable.

Intimidation and dominance are methods used to control both humans and horses. They create, however, two very different relationships. In order to understand the difference let's start with a dictionary definition of both words.

Intimidate: To persuade somebody to do something or dissuade somebody from doing something by frightening him or her by means of violence or blackmail. To create a feeling of fear, awe or inadequacy in somebody. Synonyms: coerce, scare, threaten, bully.

Dominate: To have control, power or authority over somebody or something. To be the most important aspect or element of something. Synonyms: lead, govern, direct, control.



DOMINANCE ON THE GROUND: Tim establishing leadership by dominating his horse, Austin. Photo courtesy of Eileen Shanahand.



LEADERSHIP ON THE BACK: Tim and Austin riding bridleless sharing mutual trust and respect. Photo courtesy of Eileen Shanahand.

Just reading these definitions exposes the powerful difference between the two methods.

Traditional horsemanship has used intimidation for thousands of years for primarily two reasons: lack of knowledge and expediency. Anyone using "Natural" methods was usually thought of as controversial and scoffed at. Humans usually prefer the easier faster way of doing things and they often just do what they see most others do. Force can usually obtain results faster and is easier to teach than communication.

Communication is sophisticated and requires the knowledge and use of language. Force is simple; you either get what you want or add more force until you do. Since horses don't speak English, French, German or any other human language, it historically seemed logical to control a huge powerful creature like the horse with force, fear and intimidation.

Probably the most influential contributing factor to the use of traditional horsemanship training was War. As men discovered they were stronger, faster and more lethal warriors when mounted on horseback it wasn't long before the prevailing armies were the ones with cavalry. Even though great ancient horseman like the Greek General Xenophon* wrote books promoting: "To force a horse when it does not understand is like training a dancer by whipping and spurring." The Art of Horsemanship by Xenophon - 350BC (still available today), horse training with methods that today are referred to as "Natural," it became obvious that creating an army of 20,000 soldiers on horseback with men, who had never been on a horse before, would be best accomplished by the easier, faster and less complicated way of "Traditional" horsemanship.

As time went on the horse as a means of transport for military, agricultural and personal use became extinct and replaced by machines. Supported by one of man's favorite adage's "If it works, don't fix it" horse training and horseback riding continued using the easier, faster and simpler methods of traditional horsemanship. The fact that there was another way that brought enormously better results and was far more mutually beneficial for both horse and rider was for the most part lost until recently.

The language of the horse is body language, touch and feel. Within their herd horses always have a trusted and respected leader. They chose their leader by playing games of dominance (horseplay). The horse that causes his herd mates to move their feet first wins the game. The most consistent winner becomes the leader. Horses have been establishing respected, trusted and well-liked leaders amongst themselves for millions of years using dominance. Learning how to playfully dominate our horse using the

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Iyuptala University takes the convenience, plus "personal enrichment" concept even farther. At Iyuptala, a student takes a series of courses of her choice, earning a certificate for each. The desire of these students is to be a better horse owner, trainer or rider. They enroll in Iyuptala University first for the knowledge, knowing they can latter transfer credits.

Change has gone from one lead to another and back again. Today's woman wants the most current information available about horse health, nutrition, training and riding, because she wants to enjoy her horses. In addition, she wants her information to be so good, that she can get college credits just in case she decides she wants a career.

Today's woman wants it all, education, convenience, affordability and the credentials for success; and she gets it. Colleges are responding to the cues.

And, of course, there is another big change for women and horses...they now dominate the horse industry. The image is no longer of the cowboy....it's the cowgirl who now controls the "reins."

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barn and I was not there. The rain was pounding on the tin roof and this seemed to set the mare off. She has been ridden indoors with the rain many times) but the owner had also bought a new saddle and a new bit. The combination at that time was not working out too well, so the student opted to untack her and call it a night. That was the best thing she could have done. My question is, would you have gotten on and ridden? Many of you will say yes of course! Keep in mind I am talking about a usually quiet horse that nothing seems to bother. So, what kind of ride would you have had? Would you be fighting with her to get her attention? Would you be forcing her to ride in the scary ring? Of course you would be. Would it be fun? No! In this case my student made the correct choice and proceeded to have a nice lesson the next time she rode. No fighting with her horse, no blaming the horse for acting badly. She knew not to ride, where many others would just get on.

I am talking about the less experienced riders, not the experienced riders that would get on any type, make or model of horse in any type of condition.

Next time you are around the barn, keep an ear open to what people say to each other after they are done riding. You will hear parents ask their children "How did you do?" The children will say "Good" Then listen to the adult riders. You might hear "So, how was your horse today?", the answer being either good or bad. I think this brings me back to my title question "Bad horse day? Or bad horse?" Shouldn't we look back on how we did riding the horse? If we did "well" then the horse did well. If we did not do as well, how can you blame the horse, he was only doing what you asked!

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"Groundwork" techniques of Natural Horsemanship enables us to become that leader.

Horses are prey animals that fear they will be eaten by predator animals. When a human (predator) uses intimidation to control his horse, it often frightens the horse causing him to want to get away. Even if he stays, at the very least the horse develops a deep resentment and lack of respect toward his human "leader". The way this shows up in most situations is usually expressed with statements like: "My horse bit me today. I can't believe it. He loves me, why would he do that." "When I go to — my horse, he always pins his ears." "We were on a nice ride and all of a sudden my horse took off. I tried to stop him but he wouldn't listen to me. It was terrifying."

I teach all my students how to establish leadership with their horse mentally, emotionally and physically on the ground before

they go riding. Without first using groundwork to establish positive leadership, getting on a horse who has been intimidated and is either fearful or disrespectful often ends up poorly for everyone.

Interestingly one of the most challenging aspects of Natural Horsemanship I hear from some of my students has nothing to do with the horse. They tell me it's experiencing ridicule from their "friends" for not using "Traditional" methods. I suppose it's similar to what was said to Columbus when he said the world was round. Until Columbus was able to produce results that proved his ideas, he too was ridiculed. Everyone knew they had the right answer: the earth was flat. That was the "Traditional" knowledge of the time.

Today Non-traditional Horsemanship is no longer obscure. Just go to Google and type in Natural Horsemanship. It's not only becoming a worldwide phenomenon it's gradually becoming so dominant it may soon become traditional.

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"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a person in everlasting ignorance - That principle is contempt prior to investigation." *Herbert Spencer - 1935*

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the trot of a relaxed and happy pony versus the trot of a relaxed and happy horse.) Some Exercises To Work Toward Recognizing the Best Tempo for Your Horse:

1. ride a 20mm circle to the left at the rising trot. Count the beats to yourself- "one-two, one-two, etc. The number of one-twos that fits into a unit of time, (let's say one minute) is the tempo.

2. in the middle of the ring change to a 20mm circle to the right-keep counting, "one two, one-two. CHECK was the tempo the same left and right?

3. now repeat steps 1 and 2, but ask the horse to move on a little while maintaining a giving hand. CHECK does the horse move more freely in his shoulders and back now as he executes #3, or was he better on #s 1 & 2?

4. repeat steps 1-3 now at the canter. Don't do this exercise at the walk. Doing too much walk on contact at this early stage of training can lead to problems later in the collected walk.

These exercises will begin to give you a sense of what's going on with your horse.

You have had to focus on the first building block of the pyramid-pure rhythm with tempo. Your horse's response to these exercises also begins to give you a sense of what you will have to work on for the second step-looseness and freedom of movement.



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