

The Clicker Brat or Just Do-it
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When someone trains with Parelli or Anderson, one might think of creating children who in Clinton's words "suck it up" or sit quietly and offer nothing unless asked. We sometimes speak of Parelli level 1 as getting rid of the "ya buts". One can do this without creating fear. But, the message is clear to the horse of listen don't speak, offer nothing, do what you are told. In a way, this is what the school systems appear to want of our children these days. If this is what you want, then it is a very valid way to train. Clinton will tell you that he is not interested in the opinion of the horse. This desire is not necessarily bad. But, we as clicker trainers want more than a horse that simply says "yes sir". And, it does not develop Einsteins. The NY times had an article on how this stifles creativity.

Contrast that with the kid who experiments with everything. Wants to know what will happen "if", loves to learn, tries everything. Mark Rashid is fond of telling us that the horse is always asking questions and any question left unanswered by us has just received a "yes". That puts a huge responsibility on us to answer EVERY question and to notice every question.

In our comfort zone of having the horse that does not ask questions, we can become a little less particular, a little complacent. Then, when we start to clicker train we all of a sudden open up the phone line and we ask the horse to have a conversation with us. A conversation implies a two-way exchange. It wouldn't be much fun to pick up the phone and speak into it without receiving an answer. But, when we ask for an opinion we have to be prepared to hear what we hear. And, respond in a coaching parent way to help the horse find acceptable ways to converse. The horse has his own language and its natural for him to begin to "talk" in ways he might speak to another of his own species. This conversation may begin with an ear flick and if the other horse did not notice, he might have to speak a little louder. A horse speaks to another horse in very subtle body language. The tough part is that we don't read that subtle body language very well. Or, even if we do, we don't answer every question. This is especially true if we are used to the horse not talking. Answering every question takes focus, patience and presence.

As clicker trainers, one of the things we need to teach is an acceptable way to "speak" and teach them to please don't shout. Consider the biting in two ways. At first it may have been to get your attention. If you responded simply by asking something of him, say backing up. A smart horse will immediately learn that the way to get your attention is to nip. Secondly, it might just be a "what if I do this" what will happen. And, the tricky thing is to respond without inadvertently rewarding it by our attention. It is so easy to set up a chain in a smart horse of I bite, it brings my owner's attention to me so that

we can play some more.

Think of a bright, curious child being asked to be quiet the grown-ups are talking. This can be very hard to do for them. When they are successful, they grow in mental maturity. If we consider the normal horse as being around 5, we as clicker trainers bring them to the 9 YO stage. Still too young to control their emotions. So, now its up to us to teach them how to control their emotions as well and let them mature even more.

As to where you go when you stop clicker training addresses what some folks have noticed as seeing an increase of what is perceived as spooky.

What if we'd taught Helen Keller to speak and then asked her not to speak to us ever again. How frustrating would that be for her. It is the same for our horse. We have taught him to speak. Forever more he knows he has a voice and "you" used to listen. He can get frustrated that he can no longer figure out how to speak to you. This causes tension and this tension can result in worry which will often look like more spookiness. That's because a horse that is worrying is more likely to spook than one who is confident.

What is really interesting is that the horse knows who speaks and who doesn't and never forgets this. So, if you take a clicker trained horse and give them to a trainer who asks them to be quiet and just listen, they do very well. But, they "offer" nothing. But, "You" used to talk. And, they loved the learning that they were capable of when you spoke. Forever, they will want you to speak so that you can teach them more. They now want to "know" everything.