

Loving Horses & Living Leadership
Training the Whole Horse® with Missy Wryn
Series 1 of 4

It sure is confusing with what seems to be information overload on how to live and be with our horses. Some people say “horses cannot be pets so don’t hug and kiss them” or “your horse won’t respect you if you don’t show them who’s boss, get tough” and then there are those that say “a horse is never wrong”, and “don’t ever reprimand your horse”. Where’s the balance, is there balance?

I have horses because since the age of three I loved them and wanted one as my friend and pet just like in the stories I read and the movies I had watched growing up. As a kid I took riding lessons and found incredible exhilaration and a sense of freedom on the weekends when I rented trail horses. As a young adult I had a couple horses, but had to board them out all the while dreaming of having my own place one day where I could be with my horse’s everyday. As many women find themselves raising and supporting a family like me, owning horses had to be put on hold as I sold my last horse three years before my first son was born. In my late 30’s I finally had the place and resources to have a horse of my own plus kids who could scoop the poop LOL. I simply picked up horsemanship where I had left off in my younger years being the BOSS which meant using bits and dominance to insure my safety.

For all my years of lessons growing up riding dressage during the week and trail riding on the weekends I thought I knew what I was doing, but my new horse was out of control at times running off with me down the street, spooking at water puddles and even the occasional shadow of a bird would send her in a bolt. Advice poured in from well meaning horse owners, tack shops and neighbors to try this bit or that device. From curb bits to snaffles, mechanical hackamores to two bitless bridles, as I was told “it gives a new meaning to the word Whoa”, I tried just about everything to control my horse. So how well did the bits, the bitless bridles and all the other devices work when my horse was bolting down the street? **NOT!!!** And where was the friendship and love in controlling with pain, fear, and the fear of pain? Being the BOSS was not working and I didn’t like the path I was on and who I was becoming.

I turned to the internet, my books I had packed around with me since I was a kid, and the library for videos and more books, but it seemed the messages were so diverse from one extreme to the other. There was no balance, no middle ground, no control without fear and pain or no control at all. I wanted my horse to be my friend and inflicting fear and pain was incongruent with friendship yet 1200 lbs of flesh can certainly hurt me and my horse had proven that when I experienced two concussions in one summer. What I did know is that I deeply desired, yearned and even ached

for a close relationship with my horse. Was it just a fairy tale, an unattainable unrealistic dream? My research and interpersonal quest with my horse led me to find that a **Do No Harm** relationship and deep abiding friendship with her wasn't a fairy tale and YES I could have my dream.

My research drew me to natural horsemanship trainers because they appeared close to what I was looking for in the way of communicating in horse language, but the use of bits, spurs, whips and sticks didn't line up with my desire to have a **Do No Harm** relationship. Some NH trainers say "don't kiss your horse because it is an act of aggression" and I witnessed on numerous occasions the first introduction to a new horse by some NH trainers was to hit the horse with a stick when the horse came over to sniff and get acquainted. I have to say horse lips are one my favorite lips to kiss besides my husband's LOL, and my horses know the difference between aggression and affection so not to express affection and kiss my horse was nonsense. So in an attempt to not *throw the baby out with the bath water* I filtered these trainer's messages using my own common sense as I absorbed and learned from every natural horsemanship trainer and traditional trainer that I came across. Finally I struck a balance with my horse that fulfilled her need for a compassionate competent herd leader and my desire to have a safer horse that was my loving adoring pet too.

It started when I discovered **Four Core Emotional Concerns** that we all share with horses. The first Core Concern is Appreciation. I know that I do a much better job for my boss when I am appreciated. When I've worked for employers that pick at every little thing I do wrong and never notice the numerous things I do right I begin to shut down only to offer a minimal job. When I began expressing appreciation to my horse for everything she did right by verbally praising her and stroking her neck she began to light up and look for ways to please me.

The second Core Concern I noticed was Status. Every horse has a position in their herd whether it is the alpha mare or the lowest underling, every horse in a herd has Status. I too have Status, at work, in my home and amongst my friends, a position in the herd so to speak. Learning that horses are genetically wired to require a herd leader at all times whether that is in a large herd or my herd of two, me and my horse, my position in the herd **required** that I be the herd leader at all times. Since horses are creatures of comfort they want to be in the "comfort zone" within the herd, but they don't want to be low man either so they jockey for Status continually with one another shifting position from one day to another, but the herd leader remains the same. My horse required me to be her herd leader so she could be comfortable and when I wasn't behaving as the herd leader it made her uncomfortable which brought about unwanted behavior like pushing me, rubbing on me knocking me off my feet and so on. As soon as I began applying the simple phrase *he who moves the other's feet first is in control* I invoked my horse's instinct to recognize

me as the herd leader she desperately required me to be and instantly became comfortable and relaxed with me. In my **Do No Harm** approach I came up with an alternative to round penning which I call **WHolistic Joining** that invokes your horse's instinct to recognize you as their herd leader which I will explain later in this series.

The third Core Concern is Autonomy. I know that when I'm forced to do something without being asked or given the opportunity to figure out the answer to a question I don't feel respected and therefore I don't give my best nor do I care about the individual who is inflicting their will on me. I discovered my horse responded to me willingly when I nudged her in the direction of the "right answer" instead of forcing. For instance, when I was teaching her to back up with the jiggle of the lead rope I could have jiggled, then jiggled harder, then hit her with the stick stunning and forcing the right answer, but instead I jiggled, then jiggled a little harder and then puffed up my body, gazed into her eyes saying "back up, back up" and jiggled even harder and as soon as she took one step back or even leaned back I dropped my body pressure dramatically by bowing while praising her verbally "good girl" and then walked up with my eyes dropped, shoulder to her and stroked her neck. She drew a deep sigh and licked her lips. I gave her lots of praise and then we tried again. This time I didn't have to puff up as much or jiggle as harder. After a few repeated movements she understood what a little jiggle on the lead rope meant as I respected her Autonomy to come up with the right answer without forcing her. This went a long way boosting her confidence in me that I was going to give her time to come up with the right answer without hurting and forcing her making me a compassionate predictable herd leader she could trust. BTW I do not use metal clips on the end of my lead ropes so as not to inflict pain. Consider how a metal clip would feel banging under your chin – ouch....

The fourth Core Concern is Role. Every horse has various roles in the herd as I have various roles at work and at home. I'm the bookkeeper, the cook, the laundress you get the idea. Horses have many roles too. For instance when you observe horses lying down resting there is usually another horse standing guard as Sentry. Roles change throughout the day as those that were Sentry take the position of resting while others are disciplinarians of the younger herd members and so on. I have many roles with my horse from cleaning lady to grocery cart, but I cannot emphasize enough the importance of my role as a trusted compassionate herd leader that my horse can count on for consistent, predictable, fair leadership. My horse's role is follower and friend, that's all I ask yet I receive so much more from her as our journey continues.

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Missy Wryn is the founder of *Training the Whole Horse*[®], IRON FREE Riding, and HorseMAREship plus inventor of the ALL-IN-ONE Training Halter Bitless Bridle. Professional trainer Missy Wryn developed **Training the Whole Horse**[®] on the foundation of **Do No Harm** creating **SAFER** trusting relationships with horses. Check Missy's schedule for appearances and lectures in your area at www.MissyWryn.com or call 503-630-3744.