

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF “HORSE”

Adapted from the teachings of trainers Chris Irwin and Buddy Brewer

Learning to read and speak the language of “horse” fluently is the key to effective communication. Bad behaviors and “problem” horses are often the result of miscommunication between humans and horses. Establishing a partnership based on mutual respect and trust requires an understanding of equine psychology, the ability to interpret equine body language, and the skill to communicate intent through appropriate use of energy.

THE BASICS

PREDATOR (HUMAN)

- Verbal language; speak “face to face”
- Eyes on front of head – focused on a single target
- Straight-line mentality; move from point A to B
- Humans compete to win
- Respect & trust are often demanded or assumed

PREY (HORSES)

- Body language; communicate “body to body”
- Eyes on side of head – 360 degree awareness
- Horses move in arcs and bending lines
- Horses compete to survive
- Respect & trust must be earned

FRAME (SHAPE) OF BODY = FRAME OF MIND

- Horses act exactly how they feel
- Physiology = Psychology

THE LANGUAGE OF “HORSE”

Learning to communicate with horses effectively using appropriate body language and energy creates respect and trust. Unhappy, non-compliant horses become focused, confident, content, and willing.

ENERGY

INVERTED RELAXED

“NO-GO” BUBBLE SPACE

PUSH BLOCK DRAW

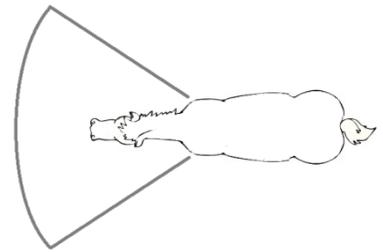
MOUTH SHOULDER GIRTH FLANK HIP

ALIGNMENT FORWARD CONTACT BOUNDARIES TIMING

ENERGY: The one force that determines everything. Horses read our intention through the energy created by our body language.

FRAME OF BODY: Two equine body positions that dictate frame of mind.

- Inverted frame (high-headed) → Adrenaline → Stressed
- Relaxed frame (low-headed) → Endorphins → Relaxed
- Level-headed → Neutral



THE “NO-GO ZONE” or BUBBLE SPACE: 45 degrees from shoulders and 3 feet in front of head. NO impulsive energy!

THE 3 ENERGIES that we create with our body movements in order to communicate in “horse” language.

- **Push:** Impulsive, herding
- **Block:** Static, closed
- **Draw:** Receptive, inviting

THE 5 BUTTONS: The areas on a horse’s body where energy is directed to create/prevent movement.

- **MOUTH:** Corner of the mouth affects the head and neck. BLOCK & DRAW ONLY!
- **SHOULDER:** Moves the shoulder over or away.
- **GIRTH:** Creates bend through the body.
- **FLANK:** The “go button”
- **HIP:** Moves the hip over or away.

THE 5 “RULES OF ENGAGEMENT”

- **ALIGNMENT:** Position yourself strategically
- **FORWARD:** “Go” (from the flank)
- **CONTACT:** Support with “good hands”
- **BOUNDARIES:** Block where NOT to go
- **TIMING:** Balance the horse’s movement



HORSE HANDLING GUIDELINES

- Respect the horse's head and neck areas at all times. Avoid petting the face/head.
- Minimize the number of people around the horse. Control the energy level and keep everything calm.
- Adjust the crossties to allow the horse to lower his or her head.
- Approach the horse in an arc to the withers. Avoid going directly to the head.
- Make sure the horse is calm and low-headed when haltering/bridling.
- Support the horse's foot at the pastern/coronet band when cleaning out the hoof. Avoid over-flexing the joint.
- When possible, block unwanted movement rather than pulling on the rope.
- Horse leaders draw first and, if needed, step back to the shoulder then send energy toward the flank to urge forward. Avoid crowding the horse when asking for a trot.
- Increase awareness and proactively prevent situations that cause escalation of stress in the horse.
- Encourage everyone to become appropriate, consistent, and accountable when handling horses.

Positive attitudes always.

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