

Thomas Herding Technique

Discovering the Communicated Equine

A View From The Hoof

Decoding the Sequence of Emotional Communication

By:

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Communication, it is the cornerstone of all relationships and of an in itself is a relatively simplistic concept that allows both the understanding of the outside world as well as individual expression to be delivered to the outside world. For the social horse, and indeed for all socially based species, this then is the backbone of *society* where both many troubles as well as much seamless beauty are found.

There are two dialects of communication; one of them is clearly and nearly purely physical communication. It's the easiest to note quickly and certainly the *loudest* and most base form and quite often superfluously exaggerated to make a point. The second form is far more subtle, quiet and at a higher level, it is emotional communication. This is communicating with very slight or even imperceptible body language owing to the fact that things like *presence, feel, emotions, intent*, generate an atmosphere.

Regardless of these dialects, regardless of the species even, there is but one sequence to communication; *Stimulus – Interpretation – Reaction*.

As we peer ever deeper into the window of the invisible, fragmented pieces of a mysterious puzzle show themselves. If you want to know anything about a social species you must look first at their communication dynamics as herd or social group and if you want to know anything more deeply about a particular individual in that group, a study of the individual communication dynamics is essential; anything else could well be a waste of time and only add to the confusion. Take a step back, and observe.

In my ongoing efforts to advance Emotional Conformation Profiling and the study of equine athletic psychology the very first thing I felt I needed to do was to take a complete abstract point of view of the entire natural system of herd survival. It was quite evident to me that herd survival and herd continuity was based not on who were the most pushy, fastest or largest animals but purely on

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their system of communication. But if herd communication is the overall picture, the individuals within it were the puzzle pieces and each puzzle piece, though using the exact same principles of *Stimulus – Interpretation – Reaction* had their own “accents of influence” on them which impacted the *reaction* of the individual as well as the *perception* of that reaction by others.

This told me two main things; one it was quite clear that *how information is delivered affects how that information is received* and two, individual interpretation of stimulus can be and is varied... a clear sign of the existence of an equine form of *individual personality*. A complex societal system revolving around the basics of communication was clearly at hand.

In order to understand what can be perceived as the strengths and the weaknesses of an individual, a study of their communication dynamics has to be done. I do this by way of Emotional Conformation Profiling, and in its purest sense I am endeavoring to interpret the horses’ interpretations. (It must be noted that both animate and inanimate objects deliver information to be interpreted, stimulus is either *given* owing to its nature, or *received* because of its existence in the environment.)

It matters not if you are working to create a program or problem-solve, the very first mistake you can make is to consider the breed or the discipline *above* the actual individual horse. No matter what your sport or goals are, everything is based upon the dynamics of communication, an understanding of how your horse comprehends the world around them and how they are reacting to it. If it isn’t a physical issue that is impeding your horse athlete’s success to the best of their individual abilities, then it is a communication based issue; either natural environment or human to horse interaction or both.

When I am asked to profile a horse, the first thing I do is begin an investigation into their communication dynamics.

Who the horse is, is the essence of their Emotional Conformation and thus is also the manager of their communication dynamics. Think about it, if you will, as being a balloon; inside this balloon of *who* is an operating system of survival based upon communication. The horse is equipped with several high functioning tools of interpretation that allow for survival and quick reactions, a sensory system that relays stimulus into the balloon for interpretation or *processing* which then dictates the required reaction (non-reactions are just as much a reaction as otherwise). Successfully completed this sequence generates an *experience* or *memory*, and the more similar experiences successfully processed a web of protection-based associations begins to form. This is called emotional growth, *learning*.

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Over time, these *learned experiences* begin to expand the balloon; essentially what we have in this expansion is mental growth and aptitude and how much the individual balloon can expand is their mental capacity. The moment experiences begin to be housed inside the balloon they start to have what is meant to be a synergistic form of emotional communication by way of *anticipatory responses to perceived stimulus* and this is in place to allow the horse to communicate and interpret at higher levels so that they do not waste energy or put themselves in life threatening situations; it is the very key ingredient of this puzzle, for survival.

When working together properly the balloon stays in its original shape but gets larger and grows into a bigger *who* with more experiences. But when there is a communication breakdown or an aberration in the sequence, this balloon changes shape.

If you think about it, the air (*experiences*) inflating the balloon in our hands holds it into a certain shape, but when we squeeze the balloon the contents within are pressed out of shape and depending upon the amount of pressure we place on it, this shape change can be small or large, but the contents are still inside. In order to return the balloon to its original shape then, we have to relieve the pressure or *event* causing it.

Very often a misshaped balloon from an equine mental aspect houses Behavioral Overcompensations and aberrations that do not work in synergy with interpretation, thus attached to *reaction* what we see as the result can be either enhanced performance (if positive learned behaviors) or grossly underachieving when measured against the assumed physical ability. Behavioral Overcompensations are influential experiences meant to enhance adaptability in survival situations by living in the *anticipatory response* areas of the equine mind. These *Principles of Adaptability* allow the horse to advance within the herd and successfully survive their environment. A detailed study of these associations is a key in profiling your horse.

Without an understanding of these individual communication dynamics it becomes easy to seek the use of physical tools to inhibit a sensory highway and *make the horse focus*. But this too is playing with fire emotionally and physically in my opinion. All you are really doing is employing more of the associated experiences inside the balloon because you are putting pressure on it; for example if you take away my ability to use my vision in the ways I do in normal life, then ask me to run at speed in the midst of other horses in a multiplicity of chaos, well if I depended on vision for 25% of my interpretation, then that 25% isn't taken out of the balloon it is simply shifted to another area to *overcompensate* by now 50% on the use of another sense. You squeeze the balloon and now there is the risk of even more inconsistency over time in your athlete.

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The bottom line for me at least, in my work, is to identify the ways in which a horse is interpreting and reacting to stimulus both physical and perceived. I cannot begin to help a horse after all, if I don't understand the language that manages their world. Like I always say: *The mental capacity of the equine controls the physical output of the athlete.* Kerry M Thomas; Founder of Thomas Herding Technique

*All of this is of course, *just my opinion.* For more on Emotional Conformation Profiling services, contact THT Director of Equine Services, Pete Denk.

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