

**It's All About Respect**  
**By Pete Dillingham**

The appaloosa grazed on the plush greenness that made up a front yard of the barn. His name was Caesar ("The Great"), my wife's good friend and horse of four years. Usually animals in his herd, of over thirty horses, spent their "R & R" time in a "dry lot". That's a large fenced area encompassing an "all the hay you can eat" restaurant for horses. The May sun was warm, the grass tender, there were no fence lines and before his muzzle lay the world's biggest "salad bar".... life just couldn't get better for the old gelding. Bambi and I had been operating Bent Tree Stables for several years but, in truth, Caesar was the real boss. His eating privileges were well known by horse and man.

"The Great's" nose came out the grass, his ears popped up and he stared to where Bambi was starting to escort a group of riders on a two hour ride. He watched her route out the driveway and just as they disappeared, Caesar trotted after the small posse... leaving his "paradise" in the dust. When I finally caught up (on foot!), a lot of cute jokes were made about the "tail wagging the dog"....and I humbly lead "his highness" back to his grazing. This time, I kept a close eye on the little bugger. Without hesitation, he buried his snout into the four-inch grass...until I moved toward the barn. Caesar, nonchalantly, moved toward Bambi's trail...I moved toward the rascal...he trotted....I ran...he galloped....and I tripped. He kicked his heels in the air as he left my sight.

A book could be written about Caesar, but this memory surfaces quickly. Why would that little guy choose to abandon the dinner table and go on a two-hour mountainous treadmill? The answer is in the bond existing between horse and owner. The kind of leadership and love Caesar and Bambi shared is the same relationship each of us can have with employees, friends, and spouses.

Whenever horse and rider are together, the rider has to be the decision maker...the rider inherits the role of being a leader. I know, you're saying, "So what's this got to do with a horse thinking I'm the 'Piped Piper'?" The way I've seen it, leadership with horses has been either demanded or earned.

The "Demands" use severe bits, water balloons (I know it sounds crazy!), bats, whips, spurs, and even 2X4s to govern their steeds. This is like a close-minded boss that threatens to fire an employee for the slightest misunderstanding or misdemeanor. Most of the time, this type of a rider hasn't learned more passive ways to be a decision maker.

The "Earns" see leadership and respect walking hand in hand. What the heck does that mean? This type of horse lover tries to respect the thoughts of their horse. An "Earn" realizes that horses share the same spectrum of feelings (fear, joy pride) that we do...and that governs their "decision-making" process. It all sounds really good on paper, but let's look at some real examples.

Recently, I was teaching a six-year-old mare to be more confident around dogs. She could handle one or two ferocious mutts pretty well...but as we approached a whole kennel of barking hounds next to the road, she said .....**"NO WAY"!!** There was

**nothing shorter than an intervention by God that was going to get her past that many “horse eating” mongrels. In the old days I would have “Horsed” her past those yipping dogs and at future kennels, she wouldn’t have known who to fear the most...me or the bloodthirsty wolves. Today it’s different. I have the respect, tools and knowledge to take the time to get a horse past its fears. It took almost an hour, but when we calmly rode away from that stinking kennel, we had survived a “life-threatening” experience together, she had learned to trust her rider, and our bond was closer. I respected her natural fear of dogs.**

**Now don’t get me wrong. The people who earn their leadership don’t always use passive dialog to solve every problem. There are “crimes” that every critter (person) commits that have to be dealt with. In horse language we “Ask, Tell, and then Demand” a horse mend their mischievous ways. In human lingo it’s “Warning, Suspension, and then Dismissal”.**

**Every rider has to be the decision maker...and every horse lover wants to have a loving bond with his or her horse. With any meaningful relationship (leadership, friends, spouse), there has to be respect first.....it’s all about respect.**