

Give Your Horse A Want-To Attitude

by Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

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If you've ever had kids, then you know exactly what I'm talking about here: Let's say your sons had waited all week to go paint balling. They'd waited all week and really had their hearts set on it. So, Saturday morning comes around and they run downstairs. They're headed for the door when you call to them and ask if they could clean their rooms before leaving. How do you think they'd handle that? They might get mad and throw a temper tantrum. They might turn and stomp their feet on every stair all the way back up to their rooms, down the hallway and slam their doors.

Now there's several ways you can deal with that. The best is to say "I understand you don't want to clean your room. But after that display you're going to do the dishes and vacuum and dust and clean the garage and fold your laundry AND clean your room. After that's done, you're more than welcome to go do exactly what you want to do.

I treat the horse the same way. If I ask him to standstill, that's cleaning his room. I say "Clean your room." He says "No." I say "Fine." Now, what can I do that requires movement? It doesn't matter if I'm in the arena or the trail. In either place I can work on change of directions. I can work on his headset. I can get the horse working better off my legs or seat. And I can always work on speed control. I could do all kinds of different things. I can work on all those things when my horse wants to move. If my horse wants to move, I say, great, let's do it. Let's work on breaking at the poll, softening up your neck or following your nose; let's work on your leg speed; let's work on you moving off my legs. Let's do all these different things, and then, when I'm done, I'm going to ask the horse: "Do you want to clean your room, the garage and the patio? Or, do you want to just stand still?" These are all things I would have wanted to work on anyway.

There's only two things that can happen. He's either going to say yes or he's going to say no. If you do this about four or five times, the attitude you're going to build in your kids or your horse is the same thing. It's going to be, "Is that it?" The next time you ask

them to clean their room, they're gonna say "Is that all you want?" And that's what I'm looking for from my horse when I ride. All I wanted was for him to standstill. He didn't want to standstill and I said fine, let's move. I promise you, after about four or five times of doing this the horse is going to say "Great, is that all you want?"

And, the more excited, the more nervous the horse gets, the more you want to do. You don't want to be riding down the trail, waiting for an accident to happen. There are two types of riders, active and reactive. An active rider does what I've been describing. An active rider hits the trail and keeps asking the horse to do something. He's not giving the horse a chance to react to a situation or the environment around them. He'll ride and keep asking his horse to do something. A reactive rider is one who goes out on the trail - and waits. He waits for the horse to do something he's not supposed to do. He rides out there, waiting for the horse to spook at the red banner. He just knows the horse is going to spook and sits there waiting and waiting and waiting. And yes sooner or later something out on that trail spooks the horse. And then he corrects the horse. The horse spooks at the banner and we get after the horse: "I can't believe you spooked." Well, he told you he was going to do it. A better thing to do would've been to pick up the rein and start working your horse. Ask him to do something before the situation escalates. Don't react to what the horse does, become an active rider. Ask him to do something.

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If we have a tough-mouthed horse, we must realize that we need to reeducate his brain, not his mouth. - John Lyons

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