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A Star Reborn Part 2

Now that Star can back-up with the slightest jiggle of the lead rope (read A Star Reborn Part 1) it is time to begin desensitizing him, teaching him to lunge with changing direction and perform a one-rein-stop on the ground which will translate under saddle as his emergency handbrake. As part of his *confidence building* I'm going to incorporate plastic bags, tarps, and saddle blankets, along with taking him on confidence trail walks in-hand. However what I wasn't prepared for was Stars lashing out at something I learned was a threat to him.....

Desensitizing:

I began Stars desensitizing by rubbing him all over with my hands gently while increasing my motion and intensity. When he raised his head out of concern I simply asked him to drop his head with the slightest pressure on the shank of the leadrope (*where the mind is the body follows*), and stroked his neck to nurture him through his fear. As Star became more relaxed about my rubbing him all over I began jumping up and down so he could see me above his head. To my surprise he pinned his ears and lashed out at me with snapping teeth. Whoa I didn't expect that and had never experienced a horse get violent over this particular process. I immediately realized Star felt threatened so for him his response was to warn me by snapping at me. However as his lead mare he found out that his behavior was an inappropriate response toward his herd leader. Therefore I quickly reprimanded him with short firm yanks on the shank backing him up while making the ssshhh ^{GHT#10} sound and kicking dirt at him. Kicking dirt is what a lead mare will do which is humiliating on the receiving end. I even let out a growl of disapproval and my eyes fixed on his eyes creating pressure. The backing up lasted only 3 seconds, but I continued staring at him until his head dropped in submission. Though Star dropped his head, he didn't work his mouth (licking or chewing) so I walked up to him and rubbed his head with forgiveness then gently stuck my fingers in his mouth feathering his tongue to get his mouth working ^{GHT#11}.

After the explosive biting episode I heightened my mindfulness of Star's pinny ear behavior, reduced my jumping up and down to small short hops, then worked up to the previous level of jumping up and down which he never lashed out again trying to bite. However Star did continue to pin his ears and raise his head as I

resumed the jumping up and down, so I made the *right thing easy and the wrong thing uncomfortable* by making the ssshhh sound which was all it took for him to learn that his behavior was unacceptable by the lead mare (me). Star quickly learned I was not a threat and became desensitized to the jumping and seeing me above his head.

GH Tip #10 – SSSHHH. I prefer to use the ssshhh sound instead of “NO”. The ssshhh sound is quick and startling enough to get the horse’s attention. “NO” tends to be used with a deep voice, but the ssshhh is a real attention grabber. I only reprimand when a horse behaves disrespectfully or dangerously. The level of the reprimand must fit the behavior. For instance if a horse tries to rub on me without my permission knocking me off my feet I’ll ssshhh and back them up a few steps *controlling his feet*, making the wrong thing uncomfortable. If a horse tries to bite me I will attempt to make contact with the back of my hand under the horse’s chin then make the ssshhh sound several times while backing up the horse vigorously kicking dirt at him. When a horse learns the ssshhh sound often that is all it takes for him to realize he’s crossing the line with me and will stop the behavior.

GH Tip #11 – Chewing his thoughts. When training a horse and he’s had an “ah ha” moment the horse will likely work his mouth for which I will pause so the horse can *chew on his thoughts*. When the mouth is working the horse is *licking his brain or chewing his thoughts* as the saying goes. If a horse just “got it”, but doesn’t work his mouth I will gently stick my fingers in the horse’s mouth and feather his tongue to get him chewing. This assists in accelerating the thinking part of his brain *chewing his thoughts*.

Desensitizing is foundational to building confidence and trust in your horse. If we limit what we do with and around our horses to keep them from being afraid or spooking, that leaves us with very little we can do with our horses and encourages dangerous behavior. I want to be able to go anywhere and do anything with my horse as my companion so that means my horse has to gain confidence and trust in me and my leadership. Through desensitizing horses become more confident and trusting in their herd leader and themselves.

Lunging:

To teach Star to lunge I stood in front of him with a training stick in my right hand and leadrope in the left (a training stick is simply an extension of my hand – if my arm was 6 feet long I’d use it the same way). I raised my left hand to the side with the leadrope resting in the well of my thumb and index finger, pointed to the left with my index finger and tipped my head in the direction I wanted Star to go. He just stood there looking at me “what?” I tugged at the leadrope in the left direction and clucked. “What?” was the expression on his face. I started to walk towards him making short quick jerks on the leadrope to the left, but Star began

to back-up not understanding me. As I continued walking towards him I raised the stick in my right hand and tapped him on his left shoulder. He continued to back-up so I tapped him again and he took a step to the left away from the pressure of the stick, “good boy” I exclaimed immediately dropping all pressure (dropping my eye contact, lowering both hands and turning my shoulder to him) then walked up and stroked his neck. He looked at me like “what did I do?” I got back in position in front him, asked again to lunge by raising my left hand, pointing and tipping my head to the left, but again no response. I gave a short quick tug on the lead rope to the left in the direction I wanted him to go, but he started backing up again. I simply I raised the training stick and walked towards his shoulder, immediately Star took a step to the left without me touching him with the stick, “good boy, good boy” I said releasing all pressure and stroking his neck. By the third time I asked Star to lunge his “ah ha” moment kicked-in understanding my body language with just raising my hand and pointing without tugging on the lead rope or using the training stick - Star “got it”!

As a high energy Arab, Star was off lunging in circles carrying his tail high floating around me. He shied into me at first as he lunged around noticing the “horse eating” wheelbarrow and muck buckets, so I stopped Star and walked him to each of the scary things to help him overcome his fear. I stroked his neck and allowed him to view each item with me standing on one side and then the other of his eyes (remember *what you do on one side you must do on the other*). After spending time desensitizing and nurturing Star through his fears we resumed lunging, however he still shied at times so I used the training stick to tap him on the shoulder reminding him of my personal space (remember *if you can touch the horse with the stick he’s in your space*).^{GHT #12} Soon Star understood to stay out of my personal space while overcoming his fears.

GH Tip #12 – Safety with a training stick & string. When using the training stick to tap a horse out of your space or energize him, tug lightly on the leadrope to bump the horse’s nose towards you in order to keep the horse’s hind feet away from you if they choose to kick out. A horse may still kick out, but when you bring their nose towards you it causes their hind end to swing away from you. Before I tap a horse with my training stick I make sure I have contact with the horse’s nose by taking out excess slack in the lead rope. I want to be able to pull the horse’s nose towards me in case the horse likes to “talk” with his back feet.

Star is ready for a one-rein-stop on the ground (the emergency handbrake). To teach him this I want to take him to the *safe and loving place* I established earlier when I brought his nose to the girth and bonded with him. As Star circled around me I dropped the training stick on the ground and drew the lead rope through my hand as I walked towards his girth. When approaching Star he continued circling around me fearfully worried about my approach. Calmly I walked closer and closer to him not making eye contact and relaxing my posture while talking in a soothing voice. When I got to his side he continued to move around me as I

rested my left hand on his back pulling his nose to his girth lightly. I stroked him gently with my right hand saying “hoe, hoe”, without releasing his nose until his feet stopped moving and he gave me a nod towards his girth. ^{GHT #13}

GH Tip #13 – One-rein-stop. When flexing a horse laterally for a one-rein-stop (pulling the nose towards the girth area), do not release the flex until the horse’s feet have stopped moving and he nods his nose towards his girth (gives to the pressure – creates slack in the leadrope). Release the leadrope or rein immediately (I drop it like a hot potato) when the horse nods. Remember to *release the pressure for the slightest try, the smallest change*.

With eyes wide Star finally stopped moving his feet under my gentle encouragement as I held the lead rope flexing his nose to his girth. He leaned on the halter for a moment and then starting bobbing his head upwards trying to get away from the pressure, but I could not release him until he nodded his nose towards his girth. As Star was trying to figure out what I’m asking he started moving his feet, so I simply moved with him **not** releasing his nose. I can not release him for the wrong answer so in a soothing voice while stroking his neck and kneading his withers with my right hand I asked him to “hoe hoe”. He finally stopped moving his feet, paused for a moment and then gave a quick nod towards his girth. I instantly opened my left hand releasing the leadrope and said “good boy, good boy, that’s what I wanted”. A few more one-rein-stops on the ground in both directions ^{GHT #14} and Star was ready for some desensitizing.

GH Tip #14– Your horse has two brains. *What you train on one side of the horse you must train on the other side*. Because horses have eyes on the side of their heads they see independently with each eye. As a prey animal this allows them to be on alert from any direction. This also creates an independent brain for each side of the horse. Therefore you must train consistently on both sides of your horse which bridges the two brains so the horse can “think” first instead of the instinctual “react” creating a safer horse. If a horse spooks and flinches in place he’s “thinking” instead of fleeing – that’s what we want.

Each day I worked with Star I began with bonding, and then groundwork consisting of lunging, one-rein-stops, change of direction, flexing and disengaging of the hind quarters ^{GHT #15}. By the end of his first week he was able to walk with a tarp completely over him covering his eyes, he carried the saddle on his back and allowed me to lay on him and stand in the stirrup on both sides.

GH TIP #15 – Disengaging the hindquarters is like pushing the clutch in on a car: all power goes out of the forward motion. Horses are impulsion animals pushing from their hind legs. To disengage the hindquarters you want the inside foot to cross in front of the outside foot which takes all the power out of the forward motion. A horse cannot buck, rear, or bolt when

the hindquarters disengage. As you do a one-rein-stop on the ground the horse begins to circle around and you'll notice the inside foot crosses in front of the outside foot. When flexing a horse laterally, press your knuckle or thumb into the side of the horse where your heel would be in the saddle and keep pressing until the horse moves off the pressure. Wait for the inside foot to cross in front of the outside foot and then rub the spot where your pressure was until the horse stops moving his feet. Do not release the flex until the feet have stopped moving however. Disengaging the hind quarters is a "complete" one-rein-stop. A horse can run sideways with their nose to their girth, but once you disengage the hindquarters the horse can no longer buck, bolt, or rear. Get this good on the ground with just the slightest pressure and then practice in the saddle.

I began noticing Star would throw his head and pin his ears every time I would step into the stirrup. At first I thought it was his stallionesque attitude, but I realized I'd better check for pain issues in the withers, shoulders, back and hips before I start riding. If he's in pain no amount of training would keep his head down and change his attitude. I wanted Star to be a willing partner and not bracing himself to cope with pain.

To check for pain I ran my thumb down his neck, over his shoulders and withers, down his back and tail area watching for muscle spasms and body language "ducking under my thumb from pain". Sure enough he pinned his ears and had muscle spasms at the shoulder on both sides, and hollowed his back under mild thumb pressure. I picked up his front foot slightly to stretch and he came off the ground from shoulder pain. That told me he needed the horse chiropractor before I start riding for sure.

By the time the chiropractor arrived the following week, I had noticed Star's belly beginning to bloat. Since the chiropractor is also a licensed equine veterinarian I asked him about the bloating and he chuckled "he's pregnant". "Well that's pretty funny, but really what is going on"? He suggested I get a fecal sample to see where Star's worm count was and de-worm if the count is higher than ten. He also checked Star's ulcer pressure point and found him to be very sensitive. The chiropractor gave me a homeopathic remedy to treat Star for ulcers along with suggestions on appropriate feed for ulcer conditions.

As the doc began his examination he found Star's poll, atlas, C2, C5, TMJ, T1, shoulder, elbow, floating rib, sacrum and tail needed adjustments. After Stars adjustments his eyes softened, mouth relaxed and for the first time I saw in his eyes he was content and happy. I followed up with a fecal sample and his count was 125!! He was overloaded with worms. The veterinarian made a recommendation on the type of wormer to use based on the fecal sample.

I highly advise getting a fecal sample before arbitrarily poisoning your horse with wormer. For my personal horses I use Diatomaceous Earth

(DE) to worm, but in the limited time of training I will use a worming paste and follow up with healthy doses of probiotics to balance the horse's gut.

Trying to paste Star was a challenge as he lifted me off the ground when I attempted to insert the syringe on his near side (left side). So I proceeded to approach from the off side (right side) pushing a little of the paste that was apple flavored onto the end of the syringe and giving him a taste. He liked the flavor and in an instant I had pushed the plunger dosing him fully before he knew what happened. Three weeks later I followed up with another fecal sample and his count was negative – hooray.

After a couple days of rest from the chiropractic adjustments Star will be ready to ride.....

For high res pics contact Info@MissyWryn.com or call 503-630-3744.

Internationally recognized Gentle Horse Trainer and member of the [Association of Professional Humane Educators](#), Missy Wryn provides comprehensive horse training, horse management, and effective communication workshops, clinics, and presentations across the globe and at her Zen Barn in Estacada, Oregon. For more information visit Missy Wryn's website at MissyWryn.com or call toll free (888) 406-7689.