

"Make Excuses or Make it Happen The Choice is Yours"

with Phil Haugen

This headline represents what sometimes may hold us back from progressing as we should in our training. It is just human nature that we sometimes get in the habit of making excuses for our own subpar performance or our horse's subpar performance. The good news is that to turn this around and start improving at a steady rate, all we have to do is take the reins back into our hands and get to work. This applies to everything we do in life not just horse training. The old saying "If it's to be, it's up to me" is one of the best slogans of all time.

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When I get frustrated with a horse that I have in training because I don't feel like they are progressing at a rate that suits me, I take a step back and evaluate myself and why the horse isn't completely understanding what responses I am looking for. 100% of the time I realize it is a horse with a human problem not a human with a horse problem. I heard the late and legendary Ray Hunt say that he helps horses that have human problems, and he was absolutely right--some horses do have human pro-

blems. For me, understanding that we humans have this weakness at times was the first step for me towards improving my horsemanship. My definition of Horsemanship is simply, communicating with your horse in such a way that they understand what responses you are asking for. If you are not getting the responses you are asking for then you need to critique the way you are asking for that response and help your horse better understand what you are asking for. Horses are just like people; I have never had two horses in training that are exactly alike. So as I go through my training program I have to make minor adjustments with each horse so that I communicate with them as efficiently as possible. If I have great communication with my horse my training will advance at a nice clip also. If my communication is not great, the advancement of my training with that animal will become a struggle and the horse and I will both be frustrated.

Always remember that it's ok to encounter some frustration when you are going through the training process with your horse. When two different animals are working together that don't speak each other's language, there are going to be times of frustration. However we also need to remember that it is up to us humans to figure it out, not the horses. We cannot continue to do things in a cer-

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tain way over and over and expect different results; that's not how it works when you're training horses. For my horses to get better, I have to get better, so that is what my focus becomes. I think about how I can get better every waking minute of every day. That challenge is what makes this job so rewarding.

We all want to put our horses in a position for them to reach their potential--the key ingredient to that recipe is that we all need to give ourselves an opportunity to reach our potential so we can help our horses reach theirs. Our horses can't do it by themselves--they need our help. We all need to try to get better every day and "Make it Happen", and we can. Try to make a 1% improvement in yourself every day and your horse will improve at that same rate of 1% daily. That is a 100% improvement in 100 days. We all would be happy with that and it is a very achievable goal. If you're stuck don't be afraid to ask for help from a professional--it will be time well spent.

I hope you have enjoyed this perspective and I hope it helps you when you are communicating with your horse. The neat thing about horses is that they are so trainable that when we communicate properly with them, the responses and results we are looking for will happen.

Have an awesome summer! Be safe and we'll see you down the road.



Photo courtesy Chelsea Kroes

Phil

