

Doing Nothing

Over the years a common misinterpretation about 'doing nothing' is perceived as just spending time with the horse. Maybe it would be better to understand that what is taken away are any typical training methods.

Although it is good to just spend time with the horse, maybe grooming, scratching, even adding sitting in the shade under a tree, we have to be proactive. Just because we decide to do things differently, most horses are used to a completely different past and attitude involving humans. We have a great idea about making important changes, but the horse does not know that. It takes action and activity to start showing the horse that things are different now.



The actual ball game has been discussed at length before but at my first attempts it was very discouraging for me. Why? Because I expected the horse to instantly fully understand the idea I had in my head and the feelings that I have in my heart.

Days went by where I was the only one playing with the ball. That is still an important step. Show interest in the ball and playfulness in hope to at least arouse the horse's curiosity. Playing alone with the ball is still not good enough. We're supposed to be playing with the horse, so I also asked the horse to pick it up. Showed him how or what I meant when I would say, 'Pick up'. I would roll it over to him and when there was no reaction, I would still show happiness and steal it back. This is interaction. The horse could become very unsure of what is going on and walk away. If the horse walked away, I would still play a little longer and then go to the horse and reassure with gentle words and favourite scratching.

We are not doing any kind of training but we are certainly doing something. It is the beginning of the horse to start to realize that we are doing something completely different, and thinking something completely different than what he is used to.

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They may seem to not do anything at all, they may be uncertain or even apprehensive but they understand. When I left the ball out, they would investigate on their own. As soon as one horse took it, the other horses became interested and the message I was trying to get across, that I thought was failing, was a lot clearer than I believed.

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Oh, bummer. The ball is broken!

It is so common to hear people wanting a better relationship with their horse but what they do is take the horse into a field and sit down near the horse. Nothing is going on at all. It is no surprise that in most cases horses will want to go back to the rest of the group or his horse buddy. People then feel hurt and disappointed. They feel that the horse is not ready or they are rushing it. In reality, the attempt has only gone as far as the idea in their own minds but they have made no attempt to actively live with the horse or do things in a different way.

I would take a horse into a field where there would be a cone (it could be any object - a bush, a tree, an old tire) about 100 feet away (30 meters) and ask the horse to walk to the cone with me. It's simple. Not even a cordeo (cordeo is really for precise signals once they understand some basics) A cordeo can also be used, if you choose, and it would be the beginning of showing the horse to understand how the cordeo works. It depends on the horse and his reaction to it and what you are doing.

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Simply in walking somewhere, destination or not, I might ask the horse to stay on my side. My action lasts only a second, but just that quick, simple phrase or gesture is doing something very important with the horse. If I'm scratching him and he is relaxed and enjoying it and turns to scratch me back using his teeth in my shoulder that is too hard for me to handle. I will tell the horse "Ow! Gentle". Show him what 'gentle' means by making a soft stroke on his cheek. Simple but very useful and practical. The horse will quickly learn what 'gentle' means.

This is to help the horse start to show his character, playfulness, inventiveness. Almost any object, a ball, a branch, a cone, can become a toy. It will not take long until the horses start to play together when they get bored. I started in autumn but you can see the pictures happened in winter. Two months is not long for a complete change but it is certainly very long when we expect beautiful changes to happen. Be patient. Do not give up.

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This is how it happened for me. It could be different for others. It depends on the horses, the environment, their past. Mostly, it depends on us. I could keep going but this would be a very long post. I think you get the idea and hope this helps. Doing nothing could be just that - but it also means doing a lot more.


