

# Student of the Horse

LESSON #3: January 1, 2014

TEACHER: Angelica

*“Do not underestimate the importance of leadership to a horse.”*

It is a beautiful sunny day, not too cold and not too windy. A perfect day for a ride and a lesson from my horse. I'm never sure if I am going to get a lesson so I pay extra close attention when I'm out on a ride. I stay in the moment and remember my role as a True Equine Leader towards my horse.

Angelica showed no signs of not wanting to go for a ride when I haltered her, groomed her and saddled her up. Sometimes, I can see at that stage that my horse is resistant by moving around, especially when saddling. I always make sure I pay special attention to these signs as this is the horse clearly telling me something. Their body may be sore or they may be saying “No, you are not getting on me because I'm the leader and you're not” or something along those lines.

After tacking up, I rode Angelica up and down the driveway as I waited for my riding companions, Tara and Sox. Angelica was a little reluctant to walk down the driveway so I used firm boundaries with my legs when she tried to turn around. Pushing my boundaries (in this case my legs) is a clear sign of not respecting my space and telling me I am not a leader. This is something I want to know before I adventure out onto a trail. I want to know where I stand as a leader. The only thing I could do in this case was keep my boundaries strong and bump her with my leg when she pushed against them, the same as I would do on the ground if she pushed into my space. When I reached the end of the driveway and turned back towards the house, Angelica did not want to walk back. Instead, she pranced and “piaffed”. This was another sign that I did not have leadership; she was ignoring my request to walk. I turned her in the opposite direction to establish a walk and then back towards the house but it

did very little. She was obviously not seeing me as a leader or she would have “stayed” with me and walked down the driveway. So, before heading out on the trail, I had to establish myself as a leader and this had to be done on the ground. I got off, grabbed a lunging whip and asked her to move out of my space (which I made very big using the whip). Then I asked her to walk and stop as I was lunging (Angelica knows voice commands because she is an equine facilitator at the Academy and must know these in order to teach students). After doing this in both directions and Angelica responding very well to my voice commands, I did the Take My Space exercise (more info on how to do this under “Articles” on the website). During this whole time, my boundaries were very strong and my bubble was big but I stayed calm and made sure there was no dominance or aggressiveness in my energy.

I got back on, rode up and down the driveway at a walk and Angelica stayed with me the whole time. I also kept reminding her with my inner voice that she was safe with me and that I would never let anything happen to her.

We had a wonderful trail ride, going through very deep snow, at a walk, and without questioning who the leader was.

Leadership makes a horse feel safe. Safety is the most important thing in a horse's life. In order for a horse to willingly leave its herd to follow a human, it must feel that it is safe and be confident that we are its leader. We need to learn how to act like the equine herd leader, the one they follow in order to stay safe. Today Angelica proved to me, once again, how important leadership is to them. Domination and force would not have made this situation any better. Actually, I probably would have ended up walking home in three feet of snow if I had been dominant and demanding. Also, it only took a few minutes to establish myself as a True Equine Leader simply because I was applying horse rules and acting in a way that made sense to my horse. Investing a little bit of ground time showing my horse I had the qualifications to be a good leader was well worth it in the end.

Enjoy the journey!