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## TEC Fall Recap

What a Fall season! Unseasonably warm Fall temperatures allowed for a leisurely shut down of the Idaho facility and an uneventful 27 hour haul to Arizona.

New and familiar faces/horses started off the Arizona fall teaching season. It also was the fifth year of the winter clinic series held at Oakzanita Ranch, in Descanso, CA, generously hosted by Peggy Martin. What started as a two-day clinic five years ago, has evolved into six days ranging anywhere from 48-54 hours of teaching. I'm so thankful to the dedication, commitment and efforts my long term students have- mostly for their horse's sake, but certainly for their own personal evolution with their equine partner. Somehow for my attempt to by an AZ snowbird, I head the high mountains in CA and seem to bring an array of weather- sleet, snow, Santa Ana CRAZY windstorms, cold, and much more.

And yet, the students, whether die-hard or just crazy, continue to trust me in certainly the most trying of scenarios. The amazing outcomes, for helping the horses through what seem the most unreasonable settings and scenarios, has created on various occasions, some of the best learning opportunities for both the humans and horses.

With weather issues, it challenges my own abilities, as I'm often "preaching" to all of my students about the "A" word... Adaptability. We've "done" round pen session with a horse tied to the horse trailer, we've created a "box" for the horse in literally the aisle of a tack room area, and much more.

I'm the first person to admit I loathe self promotion, I believe my students and their horses speak for themselves and my training theories and approaches become evident.

But one of the coolest parts of the journey, besides knowing that someone trusts you with their safety as their handling 1,000 lbs of prey emotion, is to watch the epiphany moments where the person starts to see through the "magic trick" often "sold" by mainstream gimmicks.

Potential "unknown" outcomes unravel. It is like initially attempting to read a foreign language, but as you learn the language, you become fluent and therefore you can read the words and begin to understand the story. It is no different when learning to honestly "read" horse behavior. The horses are ALWAYS telling us humans something, but often because of our own agendas and intentions, irrelevant of the current scenario that may be unfolding, we miss, have been taught to ignore, or misread what the horse is "trying to say."

The moments of achieving that black and white clarity between human and horse are what we all strive for; there is serenity in realizing how the "togetherness" with each other can feel, and the limitless opportunities it can lead to. Sam



(Photo courtesy of Peggy Martin) BC my assistant!

## Horses helping horses

Several decades ago I made a choice to leave any of the clichés in the equine world that are associated with specific types of riding.

Nowadays my approach is a culmination from my experiences from both the competitive and non-competitive world, along with real life riding such as on ranches, in the mountains, working with livestock, mixed with working with troubled horses after mainstream ways of doing things led to dramatic and resistance and fearful behavior.

Today I was working with a three year old who when he arrived, I was told was "very quiet" and his nonchalant behavior made him seem to be pretty easy going. He came from cutting Bloodlines and was far more athletic than what he knew to do with himself.

Anyhow he is very much a common example of the outward appearance "quiet," and yet the inward because of both mental and emotional immaturity, has yet to decide how he honestly feels about things. So he tends to seem "fine"... until he doesn't.

My goal is that when he's unsure or has concerns, that he can offer me an honest answer, rather than an obedient one. I would rather sort out anything that's bothering him than gloss-over concern and let it build.

One of the things I like to incorporate is working training horses off of another horse. One of the most dangerous ways that people get in a wreck is by not having a solid enough equine partner that they're riding as they are working with a young or inexperienced or defensive horse on a lead rope.



Anyhow as you can see from the picture, by the mixture of my jumping saddle, side pull roping reins, I blend the lines and use the tools of what works for me, versus following trends and clichés.

The conversation between the colt and I today, using my confident partner as an extension of me, helped reiterate just how light his softness to pressure needed to be, and the mental availability the young horse needed to offer, rather than just brainlessly following the older confident horse.

The colt's conversation with me via the lead rope, should not differ if I was sitting on another horse. There's so many important tools that can be learned from this sort of scenario for being able to redirect a horse's thought, to being able to create an independence in him, irrelevant of how close in proximity to another horse he is, to teaching him to experience energy and spatial pressure from above and behind his viewpoint and get used to it.

The conversations I had previously had on the ground I continued as I worked the colt from my horse's back. It was amazing to see the light bulb moments go off as a young horse realize the conversation I was offered him was no different, consistent whether I was on the ground or on horseback.

All the tools and things that I'm asking of him, such as the less common standard of first look, then think, then move, was a priority in our conversation. All goes towards building the foundation and preparation for the first ride. People don't realize how much you can prepare a horse for an uneventful ride if you put in the time and effort to have quality conversations.

## Spring is around the corner!

I know most of the country is still blanketed in that white stuff... but spring is around the corner. If you've been considering having an Assessment, Tune-up, Training for your horse or Full Training for both you and your horse, now is the time to reserve your spot for the upcoming season in Idaho at the gorgeous Equestrian Center.

Please visit <http://learnhorses.com/Training-Programs/> for details on training.

To better understand a bit of what is included in training, visit the Charm School

page <http://learnhorses.com/Charm-School/>

## Rehabilitating the Dangerous Horse

I recently had someone inquire about a horse that has bucking issues. It was a person who did not have a lot of experience and had sent their horse to a nationally recognized training program. When their horse returned, on multiple occasions the horse started bucking when ridden.

So their question was if I would be able to help the horse, how long it would take, Etc. This is a very common inquiry that I get. The problem nowadays with the devolving of horse knowledge among the general public, is that us "horse trainers", must also have an understanding of topics usually covered by the saddle fitter, the farrier, the vet, nutritional care, and much more, as many times there are healthy and physical issues contributing to dangerous behaviors.

I thought it would be helpful to share my response to the owner as many people seem to have these issues. The following is my answer:

There are several options for rehabilitating a horse that has become troubled and is now physically dangerous.

Every horse is an individual, so when horses arrive for training, the first week is "Assessment week," this allows me time to evaluate his current fears, insecurities, ability and willingness to learn, any potential physical/pain issues, and then approach working with him in a way that begins to rebuild his trust in humans.

By the time a horse is committed to bucking, his original "quiet" pleas for help from the human have either been missed or ignored; whether intentional or not, most folk's priorities are to "just go ride", often not realizing how much "help" the horse needs from the rider.

If you have limited equine related experience, you need to keep in mind that even with a lot of quality training, you will need to "be on the same page" as your horse. Sending your horse to the trainer without understanding how/what he has learned, does owners no good as they will not have a common "language" to communicate with their horse.

People also often think that once a horse is "trained" it will automatically maintain the knowledge or abilities; they don't. Yes, they can understand fundamentals, maneuvers, etc., but the soft/ideal ride is rarely able to be maintained on its own. If a horse (which is more common) has been trained through "obedience" and repetition, the "training" certainly will not hold if the horse is given the opportunity to behave otherwise. Every experience the horse has with a human is a "learning" opportunity for the horse; so whether you mean to or not, you may be "teaching" your horse many things you don't realize.

Also many training programs are suited to the human, rather than individualizing the methods so that it is appropriate for that particular horse. The magic "30 days" of training is mind blowing to me. There is no way a young horse can be fully educated for an inexperienced horse person in such a short period of time.

Just like humans who all have different learning styles, so do horses. This means that many horses that "go through" training programs show more resistance, fear and insecurity the more training they have. The worse the horse feels about the "human experience," although he may come out with some knowledge, often there is a lot of miscommunication and defensiveness felt by the horse if he didn't naturally fit the "program". His concerns, worries, defensiveness typically doesn't show up until the horse has spent time with a less confident person, and only then, does he offer his honest opinion or show his dramatic and dangerous behaviors out of an attempt of self preservation.

As far as "how long" it takes to both undo a horse's fear and defensiveness, and re-educate the horse, it all depends on the severity of the horse's current mental and emotional state. I offer training by the week to best suit the horse's needs, the first week is assessment week, and then we go from there. I'm big on keeping owners in the loop with weekly email updates as to the progress reports on the horse. Owners are always welcome to watch the training.

I require all owners to participate for at least a week with me before taking their training horse for at least five sessions.

### Thought for the day...

Often when weather conditions and circumstances are out of our control or are not ideal, we tend to shy away from spending time with our horses in order to avoid potential conflict or issues. I find some of the most successful learning situations are when our surroundings are less than ideal.

Here in my winter location in the desert of southwest Arizona, we had a blustery 20 mile an hour windstorm that was sandblasting from all directions. Being close to a Marine base, we also had F-35 Jets flying overhead, so close that you actually vibrate from the Jet's power. Trash and tumbleweeds were blowing everywhere. Palm trees were bent over. To see the flag standing straight out gives you an idea of how strong the wind was.

Two days before, a three-year-old horse had arrived for training. The first day we had just worked on the concept of softening to pressure on the lead rope. We didn't move farther than 40 feet from his stall. I introduced the ideas of being able to first look and think, and then move. Also the concept that he looks where he's going while he moves, rather than looking at everything *except* where he's going. Personal space established, and that if he is asked to do something, he needs to try to address what is being asked of him the first time, and not that it takes a huge amount of energy to get him to listen. Also that he can stand over grass and wait quietly without constantly trying to lunge for the grass and eat. It was a lot for his young brain. And yet there was no running, no fleeing, no chasing, no driving, not scaring him, in order to help him learn. Just simple conversation creating boundaries of what behaviors worked and those that did not. There was lots of blinking, licking and chewing, and yawning from him as he was mentally processing what was happening.

So the second day is when the wind storm hit us. It was so bad you couldn't see 40 feet out because of the sand and debris in the air. And yet I brought him into the round pen to work with him at liberty for the first time. For me the round pen is not a place to chase/run the horse into submission. It is rather a safe setting that allows the horse to learn to search to find what is being asked of him, without scaring him or driving him into giving up.

There was distractions of other horses running around, other animals running around the farm, metal roofs flapping, and yet through simple trial and error (communicated through spatial pressure and release w the lead rope hanging by my. side), the young horse was able to let go of all of the mental distractions until he could focus on just me. He learned how to be with me without walking spatially on top of me, even though he was loose. He learned how to stop and look at the distractions and then bring his attention back to me when I asked him to. And then he learned how to leave me to move around the rail of the pen, without flee or chaotic energy, rather mimicking whatever energy I was offering from the center of the pen. Then when I decreased my energy and moved away from the center of the pen, he learned to come in and be with me respectfully, quietly waiting for whatever I asked of him next. If you had only seen him you'd never know there was so much distraction and Chaos going on around us.

So the next time the weather or situation is less than ideal, remember it might be the perfect opportunity, because you may have to face addressing small issues that in the past you've wanted to mask or smooth over rather than getting to the root cause. Being forced to confront those small issues is a wonderful preventative measure for them not to evolve causing major issues further down the road.

### How to host a clinic with Sam!

Typically clinics are booked months in advance, but I do occasionally have last minute openings. It can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months to get a clinic organized. Once you have six to nine people committed to participate I will be happy to schedule a clinic.

**Host's responsibilities:** Don't be scared! It's quite easy and a fun way to gather like-minded horse people for a fun filled, safe and supportive clinic. Determine at least two date options, times, length of clinic (3-5 days) and clinic content/ focus

Secure a suitable facility to hold the clinic (see requirements below)

Distribute and collect all paperwork (see below) related to clinic registration and liability waivers

Collect fees from participants one month PRIOR to the clinic

Mail participant's registration, liability waiver and fees and submit to Sam one month prior to clinic

Organize accommodation/ meals for Sam

On-site" organizer during the clinic

Why should you host a clinic?

Opportunity to bring Sam to your area, meet other likeminded horse people, host discount of 30% off clinic fee.

Participant Requirements:

*Clinic Size*- Smaller, personalized clinics designed to address the individual participant's needs. A minimum of six and maximum of eight participants is necessary to hold a clinic. All ages, riding levels and disciplines welcome.

*Clinic Format*- Flexible according to the needs and focus of the participants. Most include individualized groundwork sessions and both individual and group riding sessions.

For details on hosting a clinic

## Difficulty leading horses... the million dollar question

Below is a Q&A that was from many years ago. When I check on my blog stats, over the last 8 years that I've had my blog "live", the #1 (over 2,000 searched inquiries) is "How to lead a difficult horse/my horse won't lead." So I thought I'd share this old blog post...

Questions: Say that I am taking my horse out of a pasture (through a gate) or leading my horse around. If the situation arises where my horse becomes spooked or just misbehaves, (bucking, kicking out, rearing, and running ahead of me, hard to control) what EXACTLY should I do in that situation? How should I control my horse? Should I turn them in a tight circle or back them up? I am clueless!

Note: I do not own my own horse/ride often, this is a bit of a beginner question, but this happened to me a little bit ago and I was clueless on what to do. Thank you!

Answer: First you are going to need to offer your horse a "clean slate" and assume that she knows nothing. Second, you're going to need to raise your level of awareness and sensitivity. The time to influence a horse's brain and then movement is not during the moment of panic/chaos, but rather ahead of time.

A horse's physical movement is a reflection of their brain and emotional state. They are a prey animal, and if feeling pressured, unsure, insecure, fearful, anticipative, etc. they tend to get "big" and dramatic as a defense mechanism.

A horse never randomly does something, so you'll need to become aware of the first signs your horse displays that she is having a problem, AND believe her when she shows them. Something has obviously been missed when your horse was initially educated, so she has resorted to "protecting" herself by taking over and fleeing.

Many times people work with horses and are hopeful that the horse will eventually figure out what is being asked of them. This leaves the horse in a state of constant "unknown."

Effective and clear aids need to be established, so that they become tools, rather than hindrances, in order for you to slow down your horse's brain, and help her think through a situation that bothers her. People tend to live in the "gray" area, but horses need to be offered black and white clarity towards what behaviors the horse offers that work and those that do not. You will need to establish not only clear communication when using the lead rope from the ground, but also spatial respect, so

that as you're working with the horse, running you over isn't an option. When you do something it must MEAN something. Every time you show up, you are "teaching" your horse something, whether you mean to or not.

Your horse's defensiveness towards you (her fleeing or bolting) is her way of showing her lack of trust and her insecurities. You will not be able to force yourself upon her and "make" her stay with you out of brute force, (though if you open any tack magazine the gamut of tack to help "control" your horse is overwhelming and an illusion.)

Your first priority needs to be for her want to happily greet you in the pasture/stall, without fear or worry. Then the basic concept of what pressure (when the halter is on and you are using the lead rope to direct her brain and body) mean, and that she is not defensive towards the pressure. She needs to be able to look (moving her head) towards wherever you make direct her, then be able to take soft steps (depending on how many you ask for), and have a soft halt (with not leaning/dragging/pulling on the rope) before you add any level of "real world" encounters.

Right now your horse is "making" the decisions because there is a lack of mental availability towards you. You need to get your horse's brain to slow down and address you, and then she will physically comply. Your goal should be to influence your horse's mental and emotionally availability in order to create a physical change. You will start to see how little an action can create a positive change in how your horse reacts as she begins to trust and respect you will. This will be the beginning of you working WITH your horse, rather than each of you tolerating one another.

Timing, awareness, energy, sensitivity and clarity are all things you will need to establish in order to start seeing positive results with your horse.

There needs to be a clarity of physical communication (because when leading her you are using a lead rope, so this a physical way of influencing her,) she needs to understand your energy and literally match that, if you want to move out in a big walk, she needs to too, or if you would like to "creep" along, she needs to make that adjustment to remain "with you." When you stop she needs to respect your personal space and stop immediately, rather than to "fall" into a stop.

Most times when people catch a horse the horse goes "brainless" on the end of the lead and is literally drug around. The horse may be physically complying but is

mentally resistant. The day will come that if there is enough stress presented, if the person working with the horse does not have enough "tools" in when they use their lead rope and clear communication in how they use their rope, the horse will get just as "big" on the rope and as in your case, bolt.

You should be able to ask your horse to first stop and think, then look and then step in a designated direction (left, right, forward, backwards, sideways, etc.) You should be able to do all of this without having to lead your horse or "drive" her (with a whip, stick, etc.) in order to get an attentive, light, mental and physical response.

The goal is for your horse to ask "what would you like?" instead of tolerating being told what to do every step of the way. The more confident she feels that you are listening and helping her when she is having a problem the more she will turn to you rather than coming up with her own way of avoiding (bolting) what you are presenting.

Once you can ask your horse to first look (to address what you are presenting) and then literally take one step at a time towards whatever you have presented, you will have established the necessary tools to help your horse to mentally address what you are asking.

For example let's say that you are presenting walking through the gate in your arena. Before you ever get near the gate you need to see how focused (mentally) your horse is on you. If you ask her to stop, back up, step forward and so on is there a delay in her response, does she step into your personal space, and is she walking forward but looking somewhere else? These are all opportunities for you to assess where her brain is at, and will tell you "what is coming" based on her response. That gives you a direction of what you need to ask of her, in order to help her through the gate area. If there is any level of stress, blowing you off, etc, you need to get a change in your horse first, before you present an obstacle like the gate.

The more you can break down passing through the gate into baby steps the more confidence she will gain in "trying" to address what you are asking. The more she believes she can "get it" (it, being whatever you are asking of her) right, the more she will try when you present new things.

By the time you present the gate, grooming, standing tied, etc., you should be able to ask your horse to walk up to the gate and stop and address it (smell it, look at,

etc.) without any concern of passing through it, until YOU ask her to.

Then you would imagine that you are presenting an imaginary line that you would like your horse to follow as she crosses the gate. First she has to be looking at this "line." In most cases if she is worried or insecure about the gate she'll try and avoid it by looking at everything EXCEPT the gate. So you'll need to address helping her focus using the aid of your lead rope by being able to establish looking specifically at the gate. She will not cross the gate with a "warm fuzzy feeling" until she decides to literally look at the gate.

Once she looks at the "line" you want her to walk on, you increase your energy (probably using the excess of your lead rope - but NOT driving her or chasing him) across the gate, literally one step at a time. You do not want your horse to "survive" crossing the gate, rather you want her to think and feel confident with each step she is taking as she crosses through the gate. As she is in the opening of the gate, you want to feel that you could stop or be able to pause her movement at any time, or pick a specific place that you would like to have her move.

After you successfully help her address and cross the gate from both directions (with plenty of breaks and rests in between) you might ask her to focus on something else and then present the gate again later in the session. The slower you can have her think about what you are asking, the better the quality of her performance will be.



This "conversation" is not about the task of passing through the gate, but rather that it is a two way respectful communication that builds confidence. It can be applied to leading, the gate, crossing water, trailer loading, walking on tarps, etc.

If you have effective tools, you can help your horse through anything. Your safety is a number one priority, if you hear that little voice in the back of your head telling you not to do something, listen to it. Too many horse related accidents occur because people are "hopeful" that it will all work out.

Good Luck, Sam

Moments from Oakzanita Ranch Clinics...  
(Photos courtesy of Betsy Mellor)



What can happen at an Alternative Horsemanship Clinic?

One person might work with a "broke" performance type horse that has been so ingrained with human expectations and patterns, and who has learned to be obedient in order to not be reprimanded, that just by being in close proximity and changing what the horse had anticipated would happen (such as not catching as soon as you enter his pen) and watch the horse's emotional roller coaster as years of pent up obedience and emotional containment are purged...

Another person might work on the nuances of rebuilding a horse's curiosity and trust after years of the human experience causing that horse to mentally shut down and check out causing the horse to outwardly seem physically quiet, but internally is quite troubled.

Someone else may encourage their horse, while at liberty, to learn to mentally search and make decisions, without being "driven", chased or scared into brainless and reactive physical movement, rather instead offering thoughtful and intentional steps.

Another person might practice learning to refine their feel and time while riding, as they raise their standard of softness and clarity towards the horse...

Someone else may be learning how to recognize from how they're sitting in the saddle, where they're horse's feet are underneath them, to offer the clearest aid to influence the ideal movement.

Another might be working with a young horse building a solid foundation of learning "how to learn" with thoughtful intention as new things are introduced, that will be used in future rides.

The horses breeds, ages, experiences are all varied. The disciplines, participants, experience levels, and their backgrounds are even more diverse.

And all the while, it might be blustery wind gusts, freezing temps, peaceful and warm, sleeting rain... The weather is irrelevant... the location doesn't matter... the "accomplishment" of a task is ignored... rather it is all about the conversation between the human and horse. The goal is to offer soft, clear and intentional two way communication.

It is only then that you see the worry and peak lines on the horse's face disappear, the muscles in the horse and human's body relax, and both take a deep, quiet, body-replenishing breath of air, while experiencing a shared peacefulness of being mentally, emotionally and physically present.

## Consultation Call

**What is it?** Don't let distance hinder your learning experience! You have the option of a private half hour or a one hour phone consultation. I will address any equine related questions, videos or pictures previously submitted by you.

**How much is it?** You can choose from a half hour session (\$40 fee) or an hour session (\$60 fee), payable via PayPal; click here to [register](#).

Once you make a payment, an emailed confirmation will be sent. We will then schedule a day and time to for the consultation.

**How do you sign up?** Please click the [link](#)

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<http://learnhorses.com/Hats/>

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## Sam's Winter/Spring Schedule 2018



### March

March 7-12

Oakzanita Ranch

Descanso, CA

[Email](#) for details

FULL WAITLIST ONLY

### April

April 11-16

Oakzanita Ranch

Descanso, CA

[Email](#) for details

FULL WAITLIST ONLY

April 28

Re-Open TEC

Sandpoint, ID

### July

[Full Immersion Clinic #1](#)

TEC

Sandpoint, ID

July 20-22, 2018

Private Clinic

Sandpoint, ID

July 23-27, 2018

### August

[Full Immersion Clinic #2](#)

TEC

Sandpoint, ID

August 17-19, 2018

Private Clinic

Sandpoint, ID

August 20-23, 2018

**Why read the blog?** Enjoy browsing the blog with my thoughts, theories and some funny stories. I've added an option (scroll the right hand column near the top of the homepage) and you'll find the option to "Follow by email." You'll automatically be notified via email of any new entry I make. Please click [HERE](#)

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