

Hoof Care-More Than Just a Trim

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By Kenny Williams



Many of my hoof care clients are pleasantly surprised when they realize I am trimming their horses at liberty or with the lead rope on the ground, often by the 3rd trim. Quite a few of these horses had prior issues about having their feet worked on, so seeing their horse relaxed and cooperative is an additional bonus to a great trim. I am often asked how I do this and therefore wanted to share my experience through this article in hopes it will fill a piece of the hoof care puzzle.

Lack of cooperation may be a sign of physical pain

I always give a horse the benefit of the doubt when he/she is being uncooperative that it may be because of pain or discomfort. I'll do a quick check for any dental problems, body soreness, stiffness or inflammation. I keep this in mind when positioning the horse for a trim and will utilize Equine Touch moves if called for.

Many older horses seem to have pain when asked to hold a hind foot up very high, so I work with that and keep the hoof in a comfortable position. It is harder on me, but much easier for the horse.

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Lack of cooperation may be a sign of mental/emotional trauma

I understand that far too many horses have been subjected to harsh treatment during hoof care, so I'm very aware of emotional trauma and fear. I've found essential oils to be invaluable in helping with this aspect of horse handling. I carry a kit with Patchouli, Lavender, Chamomile, and blends like Young Living Trauma Life & Grounding, allowing the horse to decide which he prefers. I offer him the bottle to smell a couple times and also apply that oil to myself.

Since I am also a natural horsemanship student, I'll build a relationship of trust over each trim and never use force or fear during any session, to prove I'm not "One of those people".

Mutual respect; it's a two way street

I have respect for all living things and horses are no exception. Anytime I approach a horse it is with the intent to help and with respect for him as a thinking, feeling creature. If the horse responds with disrespect, I realize time must be spent building a relationship which takes us to the next step.

Let's Move Then...

Some of the common issues we see in new horses while being trimmed are pulling their feet, leaning on us, moving around, and occasionally striking, kicking or biting. Once I've ruled out or dealt with any pain issues, I'll begin building some respect on the ground.

Rather than try to make them stand still or punishing them in anger for acting out, I do what other horses do- Move Them. Often times this is backwards, but occasionally side-ways or in a circle for a short period of time. I then relax, allow the horse to think about it, drop his head and lick his lips, and then I rub him all over to show there's no anger or hard feelings. Anytime he acts out, I do the same thing with consistency. You'll be amazed at how quickly the horse understands it's easier to stand still than to act out. This must be done every time for as long as it takes, without anger for your horse to



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understand you will be fair but consistent.

The release teaches

I don't expect a horse to keep his foot up for long periods of time but instead I offer frequent rest breaks. I ensure I offer this to the horse before

he decides he wants a break and snatches his foot away. Both older and young horses really benefit from this and it builds trust quickly.



It always feels better

My goal is that the horse always feels better after a trim and so that becomes a reward in itself. It's wonderful to see the deep breaths, lowered head and licking when I place a trimmed hoof on the ground. Rest assured that the horse knows I did it for him. This helps build a strong relationship which ensures a relaxed, successful trim.

There is nothing like having a client's horse nicker to me when I arrive for a trim as I know that lets me know I'm doing right by that horse. Trimming at liberty is not my goal, but when I am able to do it, I know I've given that horse more than just a trim; I've given him a solid foundation. A natural approach to hoof care is more than just a trim; it's also about how you go about doing it.

About the author:

Kenny Williams is a natural hoof care provider who utilizes energy work, essential oils, and natural horsemanship techniques. He is also the co-host and technical producer of the "If Your Horse Could Talk" show which promotes natural horse care through knowledge. His herd of six have been his best teachers and he's happy to pass that knowledge around. Visit www.naturalhorsetalk.com.

