

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

THE MAGIC ANSWER

In my line of work as an equine educator you can imagine just how many questions I get asked. I encourage all students to ask me as many questions as they want, at any time they want at all my clinics and demonstrations around the world. We all learn from the questions, especially me. I do not claim to have all the answers, but I will try to answer any questions. However, have you heard the old adage “there is no stupid question...?” Sure you have. But, with tongue and cheek I must disagree to this old saying. Maybe it’s not the question that is stupid but the expected answer. Keep in mind I said the “expected” answer. For example, a common problem I hear is, “Craig, my horse will not load in the trailer.” I have found that people want a quick fix, a gimmick. They have a fast-food mentality, wanting quick answers and fast fixes; in short, they want a magic answer. An answer many people would like to hear is “Thump him three times on the halter and immediately tap three times right behind the left hock and then any horse will immediately go into any trailer.”

For more experienced horse people, we know there are no magic answers and most times no quick fixes. Horses make mistakes and do their own things for many reasons. In most cases I can’t do anything about what happened or what was taught incorrectly to a horse yesterday, last week, or last year. All I can do is work with that horse just like he is today, do a good job, and maybe tomorrow he will be better. In short, give the horse a reason to change—and I’m not talking about a “2×4 philosophy;” I am talking about working through understanding.

Horses learn through repetition, both the good things and the bad things. Through this repetition, bad behaviors become bad habits. Habit: it’s the easiest thing to make and the hardest thing to break, so be sure you are teaching good habits. You may not think you are “teaching,” but remember that the horse is always learning. That can be a problem for many horse people. They are not aware they are teaching bad habits and before you know it, you have this “problem horse.”

Bear in mind, many times the problem is exactly what you taught your horse. Recognize that you want a quick fix or the “magic” answer. The true answer in many and most cases is slow, tedious, and good old solid basics. Fundamentals and foundation is where you need to go back to. Slow down, back up, and give your horse the reason to change. Be willing to give your horse the time it takes to change the bad into the good. All things worthwhile take time. Remember there are no shortcuts, only straighter paths. The magic is within your horse and within yourself. You just have to dig around in there to find it. With patience, understanding, and solid horsemanship you will find the magic answer.

—*Craig Cameron*