

## #1 WHAT DO I WANT?

## #2 IS WHAT I WANT REASONABLE?

## #3 CAN I COMMUNICATE IT PROPERLY?

## #4 HOW DO I MEASURE THE RESULTS?

If we can ask those four questions and come up with an answer, it suddenly makes the process of what we are trying to achieve with the horse much easier.

I'd like to share a story from my high school days that illustrates this process. One of my teachers in high school, Mrs. Ruth Ann Coffey, liked to call us to do math problems on the board in front of the class. Eventually that dreaded day came when she called out my name. My heart sank when I heard her say, "Mr. Van, can you come to the board, please?" On that board I face a big, long algebra problem. I could feel my knees shaking as well as feel all of these eyes from my classmates on the back of my head as I stood up at the board and stared at that seemingly impossible problem. After a minute, I could hear Mrs. Coffey lean back in her chair with a loud squeak as she looks at me and asks me "Mr. Van, can you add?" to which, I answered, "yes ma'am, I can add." Next she asked me, "can you subtract?" and I answered, "yes, I can subtract." Then she asked me, "can you multiply and divide?" I confidently answered that I could indeed, multiply and divide. Mrs. Coffey made me feel tall and proud when she declared "then young man, if you can add, subtract, multiply and

divide, then you can do algebra! My job is to teach you how and when to do those things." As a result, I was able to solve that algebra problem by breaking it down into fair and basic steps that were communicated to me clearly.

When I am training a horse, I always think about this algebra lesson. For every horse, these questions should be asked of the most basic of tasks. Is this the horse's very first ride? Am I on his back for the very first time? If so, would it be fair for me to ask the horse to trot? Should I ask the horse to walk first? Of course, the horse will be more successful if I back up and simplify my requests. Suppose I want the horse to go forward, or to go forward with a walk. Next, I need to communicate that to him. How do I communicate that to him? On his first ride, he does not have a whole lot of language he can understand. Think of something this horse can understand. Of course, I could do like in the movies and just kick him and say "giddy up"! But I don't know how many horses watch movies and know what to do when they hear that word. I want to come up with something universal that the horse can pick up on.

Once I have gotten the horse to make forward movement I ask myself, "Did he do it? Did he do it upon

request or take a little while?" My next question is, "How am I going to measure that?"

The reason we ask the measurement is because it tells us if we need to be more deliberate, if we need to refine our communication, or be more exact about what we are asking for. Maybe we need to ask more deliberately? Perhaps we may even need to ask less deliberately? In other words, maybe we need to turn up the volume or turn down the volume in what we are asking. Whenever I am trying to help my students, these are the questions I ask my them to process.

When asking Question #1, I ask them to try to think very simply; to think on a much more simple level. Most folks who have spent any time at all in a saddle, know to think about going forward first. As you think about it, your body is already starting to respond and react. The posture changes and the horse begins to walk forward. I try to get people to think in the most simple form possible.

Whenever we are working with horses we are always training them. We are training what to do or not to do.

In the beginning the 4 questions may be conscious and deliberate, but eventually they become routine each