

Shifting Your Point of View with Robin Gates

Jill Owens
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The horse trainer had been called in to help with a hard case. A seasoned horseman had rescued a gelding from a horribly abusive situation, and had set out to rehabilitate and train the horse. However, he was getting nowhere. Every time he approached, the horse would move away, rejecting his kind overtures. The trainer advised, "When he turns away from you, you must also retreat." "But," the man protested, "That will just teach him he can get away with that behavior. I must make him accept me!"

Struggling to find a way to reach the man, the trainer said, "Please, sir, I ask you to imagine something for a moment: Your daughter has been raped. She locks herself up in her room and won't come out or talk to you. Which of these do you say to her—'Little missy, you better get your butt out here this minute and come talk to me, or else,' or 'Honey, I love you and I'm here for you. Take all the time you need, and when you are ready, let me know what I can do to help'?"

This was the turning point. Armed with this shift in point of view, the man learned how to effectively reach out to the troubled horse and, in time, transformed him into a kind and trusting family and children's horse.

Offering a shift in point of view—this is what it was all about at a weekend liberty training and horsemanship clinic I recently attended with Robin Gates. Using a teaching style that employed analogies and parables such as the one above, Robin drew upon our deepest experiences as human beings to offer a new paradigm for our relationships with our horses.

Among the many clinicians I have studied with, none has offered the spiritual, philosophical, and ethical depth of thought that Robin did. Drawing on a profound understanding of horses as a species and their natural interactions with one another, Robin showed us how to develop leadership without disrespect, connection without aggression, and training without coercion.

Whether you're just starting out on your journey with horses or are a veteran horseperson, if you can afford only one horsemanship clinic this year, this is the one to take. Your viewpoint will be forever changed, and you will be fortified with fundamental principles that will temper and inform all your future equine experiences.

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Last weekend I attended my second clinic with Robin Gates. It was splendid to

see her again and have my spirit replenished with her passion and inspiration —fuel not just for working with horses, but for living in general.

For me, my first clinic with Robin was about the deep and profound connection she offers horses. This second clinic was about celebration and joy. Robin showed us how to enjoy our horses, reveling in the delight of the game and the pure fun of being together and sharing experiences. The two horses brought by participants already had some liberty training, and they were well behaved and knew the rules. Robin taught them and their owners how to lighten up the rules and incorporate the element of play into their relationships.

Robin's approach is about accepting and celebrating what the horses offer rather than getting them to meet our expectations—and I believe that this is the way to approach her clinics as well. If you come with a commitment to cherish whatever gifts she gives you, you will be surprised and delighted. Have an open, receiving mind, and let Robin fill it with her treasures!