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BE A BETTER HORSEMAN

Warwick Schiller offers helpful training techniques for you and your horse

If you are looking to improve your horse training knowledge, whether it is to produce your own homebred's, re-train a new purchase from the racetrack or simply just widen your personal understanding, then following the horse trainer, Warwick Schiller, is well worth your time.

The initial training can make a huge difference as to whether a young horse will ever reach its full potential. The talented ones will always rise to the top but it is the horses that people class as crazy, hot, lazy, don't want to travel, etc., that should make it with a trainer who takes the time to overcome problems and teach the horse in a way it understands. Most problems come from anxiety and Warwick specializes in ways to teach the horse to overcome this and avoid future problems along the way.

Warwick has the ability to explain training principles and techniques in such a simple way that people thoroughly understand and can easily convey everything to their own horse. His solutions to problems do not involve gadgets and gizmos, just patience and an understanding of the principles behind the techniques he shows people to use.

One of Warwick's favorite quotes is from the classical Portuguese rider, Oliveira: Your horse needs to be relaxed, but remain powerful.

Warwick explains, "Say your polo pony is really quiet, but has no go, or you have one that gets wound up and then cannot relax, those horses are not going to make much of a polo pony. They have to be a balanced individual and you can teach them this."

Although modest, Warwick has huge background knowledge as a reining train-

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Warwick Schiller travels the world giving horse training clinics and has created an extensive online video library to help others.

er. Representing Australia in the 2010 Equestrian Games, he has an in-depth understanding of exactly how to teach any horse to be responsive, light and super handy. Reining horses also need to be able to go from full speed to a stop and turn on a dime in an instant, while all the time staying level headed. All these maneuvers are very relevant to what is required in a top polo pony. A horse in the paddock performs these moves effort-

"As to methods, there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring the principles, is sure to have problems."

—Harrington Emerson,
early 20th century efficiency engineer

lessly, however, anyone who has trained young horses will know that having the skill to recreate this perfectly with a rider is much harder than you could imagine without vast amounts of experience and knowledge.

By teaching people to focus on the principles behind horse training, Warwick sets up his students with the essential background knowledge needed to make any method or technique work to their advantage. Understanding the principles is one of the biggest breakthroughs anyone can make to become an accomplished trainer and achieve great things with every horse they start. The vital elements enable people to come up with solutions when a horse may not understand what is desired from it through current techniques.

Warwick's story began growing up in Australia on a 1,200-acre sheep and wheat farm just inland from Sydney. He grew up with horses and went to pony

club when he was younger, however, his professional career started on a very different path to what you may think.

He worked in a bank until the end of 1990. At that time, the bank would give their employees a year's leave without pay for 12 months to travel. As horses were still his passion, Warwick set off to America to work for a reining horse trainer called Don Murphy to further his knowledge. The day he finished and was due to go back to Australia, Don shook his hand and told Warwick he had what it takes to train horses for a living if he wanted.

"That was an epiphany right there," says Warwick. Not being a huge planner in life he says it hadn't even occurred to him, however, a great receiver of what the universe sends his way it all seemed to fit into place. Besides, once back in Australia he not only had the job calling but also his future wife-to-be, Robyn. These were both more than good enough reasons to uproot and return to the U.S. He worked with Don for another two years, got married and started out training reining horses on his own.

Warwick explains, "To be successful at competing in reining competitions you also need to be a showman." Realizing he was much better at the training and explaining how to achieve good results, his career path veered towards these strengths, which have taken him traveling the world giving horse training clinics and creating an extensive online video library to help others.

"I'm not reinventing the wheel. The things I'm telling people, they've been said before. I'm just explaining it in a way they fully understand. This is a strength of mine because I'm not actually very natural at training horses. I know talented people who can't tell you what they do, they have no clue, they just do it. I had to be able to quantify everything to understand and do it well. So, now I just tell people how I came to understand it. I think not being talented is my biggest asset as it makes me such a good explainer," says Warwick.

When asked what is the most impor-

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Schiller says the greatest asset good horse trainers can have is empathy. He says you need to consider everything from a horse's point of view: what does he want to do and why?

tant quality to possess to be a good horse trainer the reply is empathy. The definition of empathy is being able to put yourself into someone else's shoes.

"You need to look at everything from a horse's point of view—that there is actually empathy," explains Warwick. "What does he want to do, why does he want to do it and what does he think if he goes over there to feel more comfortable. Horses like to avoid pressure. If you understand where they are coming from you can get to the final goal much faster. I would say also mindfulness, the ability to be in the moment, work with the horse you have now. Not the one you had yesterday or the one you want tomorrow. Many people have trouble with the horse because of what it was doing yesterday or they have trouble as they expect it to do something in the future, but it's not there right now."

Even something as simple as leading your horse impacts many other major issues such as separation anxiety. Rather than leading the horse beside him, holding the rope close to the horse's chin,

Warwick asks it to follow behind on a loose rope with respect for his personal space. What may seem to be a trivial exercise can incredibly solve many seemingly impossible problems with an almost unbelievably simple solution.

Warwick started learning more about horse training just as a personal goal to improve his own ability with the young reining horses.

"Once you start, you realize how limited your previous knowledge was, and you can never stop learning. It will teach you a lot about your own journey in life," says Warwick. This attribute is voiced by many of the top horsemen. "You can never know enough and there is always more to learn."

Frequently, Warwick shares with his followers interesting books he's reading. They may not even be about horse training but are always related in some way or another.

Horses pick up on what we're lacking. If we're too timid, they tell you; if we're

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too aggressive, they tell you; if you're too impatient, they tell you. Lazy and dull horses come from the owner not wanting to upset the horse. In life they also often want to avoid confrontation. Or people who are angry in life, they ask too hard and the horse then has an issue with being able to relax and come back down. Horses are a very good reflection of their owners.

As well as traveling for clinics and demonstrations, Warwick and Robyn run the online video library where they posts real-time horse training clips on how to produce a well-balanced horse. It's refreshing to see Warwick work on young horses that have not been practiced on, or horses with real problems, so people can see, not only the process, but also the perseverance they need to achieve results and correct unwanted behavior. The website makes it easy for anyone, whenever they have spare time, to tune in from around the world to learn. It is rare to find such informative and clear training tips available online and an invaluable reference for research to broaden your knowledge.

Compared to the likes of Buck Brannaman and Martin Black, who have started thousands of young horses and learned from each one of them, Warwick says he does not have the same amount of experience in that quantity, but using the main principles of training, he can solve a lot of problems and they are the foundation to succeeding.

Many people do produce good horses by just applying methods, and the super talented horses will virtually make themselves, but to be consistent and get every horse to reach its full potential there needs to be a crystal clear understanding of the principles.

One of the main principles Warwick focuses on is to make the wrong thing hard and the right thing easy.

There's an old Ray Hunt saying: First you go with them, then they go with you, then you go together.

"You have to allow them to do the

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Schiller says he isn't very natural at training horses so he had to be able to quantify everything to understand and do it well. Not being that talented taught him to explain things well.

wrong thing. Most people cannot let go of control, but if you give them the opportunity to make mistakes while all the time making it much easier for them to do the right thing, it becomes their decision to learn the right thing," explains Warwick. "Horses seek the release of pressure so this can be used as a reward and training tool. The big thing is letting the horse have a say."

An example of Warwick's technique to train a horse that is difficult to shower is keeping the hose on the horse but as soon as it lowers its head, you quit what you were doing. If it puts the head up high, keep the hose on the horse. As soon as it lowers its head just a fraction, take the hose off the top. With correct timing, the horse thinks it has made the annoyance go away and soon learns the easiest solution is to keep its head down. The same technique applies with worming.

Another important principle is not to go to bed angry. This one means any time your horse starts to get 'up' and hot, you have to get him back 'down' and calm so you teach it to self regulate.

Warwick always teaches his horses to have a really good on/off switch. This is essential if you suddenly need a quiet calm horse to take a penalty off of after going full speed at a gallop.

This is achieved early on in the training by teaching it to pay attention to you, listen and think so it is always mentally with you when you ask it to relax. Further into the training you can then start to expose the horse to whatever gets it very concerned and then teach it to bring itself down. Most dangerous situations arise from horses not knowing how to mentally cope with something that worries them. Warwick explains, "They are emotional creatures and that is the biggest problem, but we can teach them to overcome anxiety. Most people get into a situation where they let the horse build up its fears, which may only start with a simple thought, which then, eventually repeated, it explodes with worry and has no idea how to cope."

Choose where you work and choose where you rest. This principle is key to avoiding the horse getting sour or starting to nap. Warwick explains, "Your horse takes extensive notes on where he works and where he rests. If there is any common denominator a horse will avoid the places where he works and stick by the places he rests. If he goes out and plays a chukker and comes back to rest in the pony lines, that's why he doesn't want to go back to the playing field. He's not being cunning, he's



He teaches people to work with the horse you have now. Don't dwell on what it did yesterday or what you expect it to do in the future.

not being bad, he's being a horse."

The solution is to make the time to work the pony with that problem by the pony lines and then take him to rest and relax out on the polo field until he has overcome the issue.

If a horse wants to duck out of a corner in the arena, the famous dressage rider Charlotte Dujin trots to the corners, stands and rests. So instead of trying to duck out of the corner the horse starts to ride into the corners. Every horse mentally makes notes. A horse gets arena sour because it was made to work hard in the arena. The solution is to change the routine, practice all the moves out hacking and then last thing just let the horse relax and chill walking around the arena. If you're aware of how much of an impact simple things like this can achieve then you can really change a horse's mind towards its work. With a willing partner it is possible to achieve far greater things than one fighting against you.

A principle that is often overlooked is the concept of a horse needing to know the answer before you ask the question.

"Here's a big one," says Warwick. "It is important to understand that if you ask your horse something that is not likely to end in success, then you are setting them up for failure."

Breaking things down into increments helps. Like a small child, if it cannot understand ABC you need to go back to learning A, then B, and then learn C before adding them all together. Breaking lessons down into small incremental steps and then repeating them until they are perfectly understood is the fastest way to teach horses. Patience and time to properly explain to the horse what you want is ultimately faster in the long run and essential if the horse is to end up performing maneuvers correctly, straight and balanced.

Warwick stresses that it also makes a difference if you start connecting 'you' to all the things your horse enjoys/likes. You need to 'feel' happy with genuine enthusiastic heartfelt appreciation for the thing your horse just did. It picks up on this and will repeat it again and again for the praise if you have your horse's attention. Just like us, horses cannot respond appropriately if their mind is occupied elsewhere.

Lastly, do the opposite. This is so horses don't start to anticipate. An example of a specific method Warwick has devised for horses that want to rush to the front of a galloping group on a trail ride is as soon as the horse has passed everyone, the solution is for everyone to turn and go in the opposite direction, so once again

the horse is at the back of the ride. With this exercise repeated the horse will soon stop rushing as it learns that it never gets to the front.

Anticipation can also work in your favor. For example, the stop is very important in polo. "Actually I start teaching the stop at the standstill. The back-up is the stop. Back up from 0 mph. Then I want them to stop and back up from a walk, then stop and back up from a trot, then stop and back up from a canter. For me the back up is the important part. The thing that makes them stop faster is the anticipation. The reining horse doing the sliding stop is anticipating the back-up," explains Warwick. "Anticipation can be your best friend or your worst enemy. The difference is you're teaching them to want to do it. It's all about finesse. There is so much psychology going into training horses. You're not making them do it, you're teaching them to want to do it and they are eventually offering those moves on their own."

Realizing any behavior that is reinforced and rewarded with the release of pressure is likely to happen again, and any horse overwhelmed by anxiety will not register the good things as easily. The whole process starts to go far more smoothly when horses focus on you and know how to self regulate. Then, all the other stuff goes away and that's what gets them to relax.

There should be no difference in the time it takes to train mares compared with geldings under a trainer who understands how to teach them in a way they can understand easily. What makes the difference is good vs. bad training and having the knowledge and skills to produce a champion.

Horse training is an art, you can learn it or you can be a natural. The key is understanding that everything you do is based around those basic principles and that they are the core to being consistently successful. Opening your mind and doing a little research can vastly improve anyone's horsemanship skills to a whole new level. ♦