Communicating with Horse People

Cornell Cooperative Extension, Departments of Animal Science and Education at Cornell University

"There are only two kinds of difficult people, you and I." - Marvin Glock

"No new ideas ever entered the mind through an open mouth." - Sperry Corporation

"Our greatest strengths are often our greatest weaknesses." - Clint Young

If the ability of horse people to communicate is increased, many of the problems within the horse industry could be improved. The impact of this increase in communication skills could:

- increase unity within the industry
- increase collaboration
- improve the respect for the industry
- recognize horses as a viable agricultural industry
- decrease the amount of infighting.

Communication

Communicating with others is essential for the survival of each of us. However it is one of the most least understood and rarely taught skills in our educational and social systems in the United States today.

Can Horse People Communicate??

It is sometimes said that horse people are "difficult to deal with." What we do as horse people has impact on that reputation. Horse people tend to be extremely hard working, self motivated, an independent. They are not afraid to express their opinion! Communicating with others is what makes the "World go Round". Learning to communicate more effectively can only make everyone's life easier and more enjoyable, whether they are horse people or not.

Introduction

Problems within the horse industry in past years have been:

- lack of unity
- lack of collaboration
- lack of respect for the industry
- lack of recognition of the industry as a significant contributor to the economy
- infighting within the industry.
If all of us learn to:

- be assertive without being aggressive,
- say clearly what we mean,
- encourage the people we communicate with to do the same;

we will all be better understood and we will understand others better, too. This can only be to the advantage of all.

What Is Communication?

Most of us may not realize it, but we are communicating almost constantly during our awake hours. It is estimated that we communicate verbally 70% of our waking time.\(^1\) When we are at work our communication time is spent as follows:

45% listening  
30% talking  
16% reading  
+ 9% writing  

100% of our communications time at work.\(^1\)

Communication requires at least two people. Many studies indicate that 90% of communication is non-verbal. Examples of non-verbal communication:

- body language  
- facial expressions  
- tone of voice  
- gestures  
- posture  
- mannerisms  
- dress  
- even touch, smell, and taste\(^1,2,3\)

There are four main purposes for communication:

- to inquire  
- to inform  
- to persuade  
- to establish good will

"Interpersonal communication does not simply involve the exchange of messages. It essentially involves the creation and exchange of meaning." There are six major elements of the communication process:\(^2\)

1) THE SENDER - the person speaking or writing.  

2) THE MESSAGE - what is said or written.  

3) THE CHANNEL - the medium in which the message moves i.e. phone, writing, etc. The choice of a proper channel has an important influence on how successfully the message is received.  

4) THE RECEIVER - the person listening or reading the message. This person must pay attention in order to interpret the message properly.  

5) THE PERCEPTION - the receiver's interpretation of the message. Both verbal and non-verbal elements affect interpretation of the message.  

6) FEEDBACK - the receiver's response to the sender or reaction to the message.

It has been documented that good communication affects the morale of people in both personal and work environments. If the communication process is working well both the sender and the receiver/s feel that their needs are met. When this happens people are happier in life, relationships, and their jobs.

Learning to communicate well is an ongoing learning process. Communication skills can improve with awareness and practice. Due to the information explosion of today, there is literally too much information available for the average person to adequately process. The quality of communication is more important than ever!\(^1\)
Effective Speaking

Effective speaking is essential to the communication process. Learning to become a more effective speaker will help each of us to become a better communicator.

Effective speakers make a favorable impression on the receivers of their message. To be effective a speaker must

- Know the subject
- Look good
- Sound good.

The following are qualities of effective speaking:

**VOLUME** - The message must be heard to be received and understood.

**PITCH** - A moderate, non-annoying pitch, with a raising and lowering (intonation), works best.

**TONE** - Tone is a combination of volume + pitch + emotions + attitudes. The tone reflects the personality of the speaker.

**TEMPO** - The speaking speed should be slow enough to be understood, but fast enough to not allow boredom.

**PRONUNCIATION** - Saying the words correctly increases understanding.

**ENUNCIATION** - Speaking distinctly, with clarity, is important.

Speaking is a skill that can be improved with practice. Speaking publicly is one of the greatest fears of the average person. Take every opportunity to speak in front of groups. You can learn to become an effective speaker regardless of whether you are speaking to one person or to two hundred. Remember to be prepared, look good and sound good!

Active Listening

"Listening is the most neglected communication skill." If you remember 45% of the time we spend communicating at work is utilized by listening. Most of us need to learn to listen more and talk less, as well as to improve our listening skills. One way to do this is to become an "active" listener. By active, we mean not only to listen closely but also to interact with the other communicators by clarifying, questioning, and giving appropriate feedback.

In two weeks most of us forget about 75% of what we have heard. "That's not a listening problem but a remembering problem." Becoming a better listener allows us to put more information into our long term memory. Below find some of the benefits of effective listening:

- Good listening is the best way to improve your overall language skills.
- Good listening increases your general knowledge.
- Good listening helps you become a better conversationalist.
- Good listening will improve your on-the-job performance.

Effective listening is a complex combination of many interpersonal skills that must be balanced well to become an effective listener. When you are actively listening to someone you should be utilizing:

- non-verbal communication
- reinforcement

*Communicating With Horse People* – Cornell University
• questioning
• reflection
• opening and closing topics and exchanges of information
• explanations, both asking for and giving
• self-disclosure.

Giving feedback is a very important part of the listening process. It is the only way to ensure accurate interpretation, and interpretation of what is being said is crucial! When giving feedback remember there is a fine line between:

• being impatient and being rude
• being assertive and being aggressive
• being assertive and being non-assertive
• being rational and being irrational.

It is also important to realize who we are dealing with and the state that they are in at the time may affect interpretation of what is being communicated.

For Example: If you are the horse show manager and the same horse show Mom that is always complaining about the judges is complaining again, you may need to filter some of the message that is being conveyed!

or if the horse show Mom we are talking with is normally soft spoken and calm, but in this situation is angry and loud, we may just need to give her a chance to cool back down.

Self-disclosure is a very important part of active listening for all communicators. This is because it creates a feeling of closeness, trust and understanding. Joe Luft and Harry Ingham created a model to demonstrate the principal of self-disclosure. This model is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPEN</th>
<th>BLIND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIDDEN</td>
<td>UNKNOWN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


OPEN - information about myself that I know and others know about me i.e.: I am married and have two children.

HIDDEN - information I know about myself, but I will not reveal to others. i.e.: I told my teacher a lie in second grade.

BLIND - information and perceptions about me of which I am unaware i.e.: habits that are annoying to others.

UNKNOWN - information that is not known to me or to others i.e.: deep rooted unconscious anxiety that may be well under control at the present.

Being aware that each one of us has information in all of the four areas can only help us become better listeners. This enables us to better understand others when the communication process does not seem to be working as well as we would like it to.

Remember that different relationships require and involve different amounts of self-disclosure. Certain information may not be appropriate or necessary for a given level of communication. Do not force an individual to disclose what they feel is none of your business for a given communication relationship. Also know that different people feel comfortable with different degrees of self-disclosure.
Two very typical barriers to good listening skills are:

- verbal battle
- fact hunting.

Try not to get involved in either so that a healthy path of communications will not be broken.

Active listening is the most under used tool that can increase good communication. It can be practiced and each of us can significantly increase our skills in this area.

**Paraphrasing and Message Clarification**

It is very important to learn to paraphrase, reiterate, clarify and come to consensus about a message, when communicating with others.

**PARAPHRASE** - to reword a person's message in your own words, interpreting what they have said, includes meaning and feelings.

**REITERATE** - to feed back to the group or individual in your own words with your interpretation, what they have said.

**CLARIFY** - to reword your interpretation so that it accurately reflects what they actually "meant". It is important that the person/s you are communicating with are active in this process, if not the communication process will break down.

**CONSENSUS** - all agree about what was said, the interpretation was correct and there is agreement with the summary of the conversation. Summarizing is the most important part of this process.

**I and We Messages**

The simple ways in which we speak can have a profound impact on the outcome of communicating with others. The use of *I*, *we*, and *you* can change the whole meaning and the interpretation in a communication situation.

Remember to use:

1) "I" and "we" messages instead of "you" messages,
2) "ands" instead of "buts,"
3) change "always" and "never" to "sometimes,"
4) and change "shoulds" and "woulds" to "coulds."

There is a lot of truth in this jingle, try to use it and it will help you be a better communicator.

Use *I* and *we* instead of *you* when you are trying to paraphrase and clarify the meaning of what is being communicated to you.

**Examples:**

*an "I" message:*

What "I" think I am hearing you say is...

rather than

What "you" said was....

*a "We" message:*

If "we" do this it will help...

rather than

If "you" do this it will help...

You messages have negative effects:

- they create resistance and prevent change.
- they invite retaliation and make people see REDI
- they may be interpreted as a lack of respect and diminish self-esteem.
- they may create feelings of resentment as the message may seem to inflict punishment.
- they may create feelings of guilt.

*messages have a positive effect on communication. "I" messages should have three parts:*

1) State briefly the Interpretation of the message using "I". If there is behavior
that you want changed, briefly state the behavior in a specific non-judgmental way.

2) Indicate how this makes you feel.

3) State clearly and specifically how it affects you.¹

I.e.: "When I receive the horse show results late, I become frustrated and upset, because the press release will not go out until tomorrow."

As you increase your communication skills use / and we messages as a tool to get your meaning across. Pay very close attention to semantics. Any word or phrase can make a difference.

Body Language

As mentioned earlier in this article approximately 90% of communication is non-verbal. Body language is one of the most important factors in non-verbal communications. A person can say one thing but send the exact opposite message with their body language. The perception and interpretation of the message will not only be confused but the receiver will have a negative feeling about the message and the person sending the message.

Use body language to project a sign of self-confidence, attentiveness, and honesty. All of these will show that you are interested and assertive rather than uninterested or aggressive.

As you learn to use body language as a tool for communication, remember to think about how you use:

- eye position
- head position
- body position
- position while standing
- position while sitting
- facial expression
- loudness of voice
- speed of speech
- open body language
- closed body language
- bodily touch
- affectionate touch
- gazing, staring and duration.

You probably can think of many other examples and the ways that you and others have used them. Be careful how you use body language, as you may very well be confusing a perfectly good message!

Distractions

There are many different types of distractions. Like a phone connection, distractions cause static that interferes with reception. Most distractions fall into two major categories, internal and external.

INTERNAL - These are distractions that come from within the person. i.e.: anger, stress, resentment, work load, life circumstances, etc.

EXTERNAL - These are distractions that arise from the surroundings the person is in. i.e.: room temperature, location of desks, tables and chairs, where each person is sitting, are they sitting?, lighting, etc.

Internal distractions are harder to handle than are the external distractions in a communication setting. Often one of the communicators is completely unaware that the other person may be distracted by internal concerns. Internal distractions are a way of life. Internal distractions can be severe, but many times are not self-disclosed to others.

You have more control over the external distractions. Be sure to offer someone a seat in your office, if you are sitting. If you anticipate a difficult conversation arrange the chairs in a non-intimidating way. Some people deliberately position their office furniture to give themselves
an advantage or an atmosphere of power, for example sitting behind a desk and looking over it to talk with someone. Each of us needs to seriously think about all of these when communicating with people. Internal and external distractions can destroy a healthy communications atmosphere. You can do much to prevent this if you learn to be aware that distractions do exist.

Understanding Each Other

If we learn to understand ourselves, learn to understand others and then recognize that different people relate differently, we will learn to become better communicators.

A quote from communication expert Deborah Tannen’s book You Just Don’t Understand: “Everyone is shaped by innumerable influences such as ethnicity, religion, class, race, age, profession, the geographical regions they and their relatives have lived in, and the many other group identities - all mingled with individual personality and predilection(preferences).”

Understanding Ourselves

The first step in understanding others is to understand ourselves. To understand ourselves we must recognize:

- That we may be different
- That we have needs
- That others may be different
- That others have needs

The way we communicate is influenced by:

- The part of the country or world where we grew up
- Our ethnic background and that of our parents
- Our age, class, and gender.

When we don’t understand that our styles of communication and that of others may be different, we are often frustrated and quick to blame

- others’ intentions
- others’ abilities
- others’ character
- our own failure
- the failure of the relationship.

If you remember the Johari box from the section earlier in this article on Listening, there were four different areas in the “box of self disclosure”. The size of these boxes may vary greatly from person to person.

For example, people who present themselves behind facades or “false fronts” have a very small “open” quadrant and a very large “hidden” quadrant, as can be seen in the diagram that follows:

Communicating With Horse People—Cornell University

Learning to know oneself can be a very difficult and even a painful experience. It is important as we learn self-analysis that we do it as honestly as we possibly can, so that we learn to understand ourselves, so that we can learn to understand others better, so that we can become better communicators.

Later in this article a very painless and very accurate personality analysis will be discussed in the section called “Three Measurements of Personality.” This analysis takes very little time to do and offers a very perceptive overview of personality traits. It is definitely worth the time to find out some things that you probably already know about yourself, but never took the time to think about or honestly self-evaluate yourself for.

**Understanding Others**

Other people may be different from us, but they have needs just like we do. Each of us must begin to understand how people differ, if we wish to learn to be better communicators.

It is wise to take one step back from the words that are being said while communicating with others, especially when the conversation is not going very well. We all carry “baggage.” Baggage is a distractant to communication. Some of this baggage is “life baggage,” which is always with a person and some of the baggage may be the “baggage of the day,” which is temporary. Remember that others as well as ourselves carry this baggage; knowing that it is there can lessen its influence.

Where we have been is who we are. Be sensitive to the fact that other people may just come from a different “room of life” than we have. Learning to be sensitive and receptive to the person or groups with whom you communicate will make you a better communicator.

Unfortunately what we say is many times irreversible and sometimes the damage we may cause with our words is irreparable. This is especially true with people that are significantly different than ourselves.

The more we learn about what makes people different than ourselves and the more capable we become of recognizing these differences, the sooner we will enjoy the benefits of better communication.

**Women and Men Are Different!!**

It is probably not necessary to tell you that men and women are different. Anyone that has been married for more than one month can certainly verify that this is a true statement!!

The purpose of Deborah Tannen’s book, *You Just Don’t Understand* and the research she has done is to acknowledge the fact that not only are men and women different, but they communicate differently. This includes not only the choice of words, but also such things as body language, tone of voice and especially interpretation and feedback. “Denying real differences can only compound the confusion that is already wide-spread in this era of shifting and re-forming relationships between men and women”.

Below find some characteristics that are generally gender based:

**MEN** - Practice one-up and one-downsmanship; want the upper hand; protect themselves from being put down or being pushed around; avoid failure; struggle for independence; see life as a contest; power is
important; accomplishment is important.

WOMEN - Build a network of connections; conversations are important; confirmation is important; they value negotiations; closeness is a good thing; like to reach consensus; value intimacy; avoid isolation.

Let us look at a situation and attempt to see how the average male and female would view the situation differently.

**Example:** The person to whom you are asking this question is presently unemployed.

You ask - “Have you found a job yet?”

**Female Interpretation:** An expression of concern, connection, understanding and human caring.

**Male Interpretation:** A reminder of weakness from someone who is better off and knows it. A condescending air.

Hard to believe that men and women are that different? This was just a simple six word question! What do you think would happen in a complicated discussion, one that involved emotion, on a day that one of the communicators was carrying some “baggage of the day”?

Tannen reminds us to be sensitive to the fact that “Communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence.”

1) **Intimacy** = we are close and the same

2) **Independence** = we are separate and different.

Be aware that men and women not only search out different levels of intimacy and independence, but communicate differently. Again, we must try to learn to understand ourselves, so that we can better understand others, so that we can learn to be better communicators. Do not deny the fact that men and women not only think differently, but communicate and react differently as well.

**Assertive/Non-Assertive/Aggressive**

Good communicators are assertive individuals. There is a fine line between being assertive and aggressive. Many people who generally are not assertive, cross the line into aggressiveness when they try to become assertive communicators. This transition for a non-assertive personality type usually falls in the attempt to communicate assertively. All of us need to learn to be assertive but not aggressive communicators.

There are generally three basic types of communicators:

- non-assertive
- assertive
- aggressive

In general, assertive communicators are the most successful of the three types. We have all assumed the roles of all three types at different times, under various circumstances. There also have been times when we deliberately have utilized one of the three, which may not have been our normal communications type, in an effort to get our point across. In the upcoming section, “Three Measurements of Personality”, a personality survey further breaks the three general types of communicators into different group types.

The goal for each of us as should be to become as consistent as possible, and to become an assertive communicator as much of the time as possible. In this way we, as well as others, will usually meet our needs.

Anger is a distractant to good communications. It can cause an effective assertive communicator to become sullen and non-assertive; or engaged and aggressive. Some people carry “angry bag-
gage" all the time; while others only become angry under persistent circumstances.

Most people handle anger by:

- Retaliation
- Domination of others
- Isolation from others
- Cooperation with others.

When you find yourself or someone you are communicating with become angry, ask the following questions:

- What in my past or theirs could be accentuating the reaction?
- What in this relationship could be accentuating the reaction? (short or long term events or conversations)
- What is going on in my life or theirs?
- What is at risk?

Everyone has the potential to become angry. We all need to understand our own potential for anger, as well as the potential for others to get angry. Learning to understand and control our anger, as well as the anger of others, will make us better communicators.

In the next section "Three Measurements of Personality", an anger and hostility questionnaire will be discussed. This personality evaluation tool can be used to help you understand your level of inherent anger and hostility.

Three Measurements of Personality

In this section three different evaluative tools are presented. There are many personality surveys and questionnaires to help people better understand themselves. Many of them are long and complicated; some are less accurate and some are hard to interpret. The three discussed here are easy to use, easy to interpret and as accurate as most. These three different measurements of personality can offer much information that is useful as we learn about the way we communi-
cate. These three measurements are:

- Type of Personality
- Type of Communicator
- Anger and Hostility

Type of Personality

We all have a general personality type. If any of you have been frustrated in the past by the teachings of Freud, Maslow, Erikson, Sheehy, Levinson, and others, you will find the creators of this personality questionnaire refreshing! The authors, David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, are trainers of therapists and diagnosticians of dysfunctional behavior. They insist that not everybody goes through the same phases of growth to maturity. "You may have an identity crisis or two, but I won’t, haven’t, can’t. And it’s not because I’m fixated, arrested, or hung up at some immature passage or season of my life. I hear different drummers."6

The Keirsey personality inventory is both user friendly and usually very accurate! It asks 70 simple questions that will not offend even the person with a large hidden quadrant (Johari Window, discussed earlier). The questions are straightforward choices with only two options. This simple and painless process outlines personality type extremely quickly.

The survey describes pairs of preferences:

- Extroversion (75%) vs. Introversion (25%)
- Intuition (75%) vs. Sensation (25%)
- Thinking (50%) vs. Feeling (50%)
- Judging (50%) vs. Perceiving (50%)

PLEASE NOTE - The numbers in parenthesis indicate the percentage of the population with this particular trait.

The survey further places an individual in one of sixteen basic personality types and in clear language describes a "portrait" of each of these types. Our personality type is a combination of four of the above characteristics; there are sixteen possible combinations.
**For Example:** One of the personality types is an ESTJ, a person with the following general characteristics:

- E - Extroversion
- S - Sensation
- T - Thinking
- J - Judging

The survey gives a very detailed description of the personality characteristics of each of the sixteen possible combinations.

This is a very useful tool for people to learn about themselves. Information about Keirsey and Bates’s book, *Please Understand Me*, which includes the survey and interpretation, can be found in the list of references. More information is given in the section “Additional Reference Materials,” at the end of this article.

**Type of Communicator**

Each person has a distinct communication type. Earlier in this article we talked of three general communicator types:

1) Non-Assertive
2) Assertive
3) Aggressive

There is a communication survey which classifies people into five different communications types, all with different ways of resolving conflict. The survey is described in David Johnson’s book *Reaching Out: Interpersonal Effectiveness and Self-Actualization*, fourth edition. Thirty-five simple statements and responses make up the survey.

The results of the survey place an individual in one of five different types. Although most people fall in more than one type, most have one communicator type that is dominant. The five types are described below:

**THE TURTLE -** (Withdrawing) Goals and relationships are of low importance.

**THE SHARK -** (Forcing) Goals are of high importance and relationships are of low importance.

**THE TEDDY BEAR -** (Smoothing) Goals are of low importance and relationships are of high importance.

**THE FOX -** (Compromising) Goals are of moderate importance and relationships are of moderate importance.

**THE OWL -** (Confronting) Goals are of high importance and relationships are of high importance.

Learning what type of communication personality we possess and what strategies we normally use to resolve conflict will help us be better equipped to resolve conflict. It is also helpful to be capable of quickly identifying which type of individual we are dealing with when we find ourselves in a position of interpersonal conflict. Conflict does not always have to be negative. As a matter of fact, conflict can be very constructive. The best communicators are able to resolve conflict and leave all parties feeling:

- that the relationship is stronger
- there is more trust
- they are satisfied with the resolution
- they have improved their ability to resolve future conflict with each other.

**Anger and Hostility**

Each of us has the potential to become angry, and all of us have done so at one time or another. Constant daily anger and hostility towards others can affect our health. In their book, *Anger Kills*, Redford and Virginia Williams describe impact anger has on our lives and the lives of others with whom we interact.

Our anger and the degree that we foster hostility, affects our ability to communicate with others. First we need to honestly determine if we are an “angry” person. Williams and Williams developed a “Hostility Questionnaire” to help people deter-
mine a Total Hostility Score, which is a combination of scores for each of the following:

- **Cynicism Score**
- **Anger Score**
- **Aggression Score**

\[
\text{Total Hostility Score} = \text{Cynicism Score} \times \text{Anger Score} + \text{Aggression Score}
\]

The three categories can be defined as follows:

**CYNICISM** - a mistrusting attitude regarding the motives of people in general, leading a person to be constantly on guard against the "misbehavior" of others.

**ANGER** - the emotion so often engendered by the cynical person's expectation of unacceptable behavior on the part of others.

**AGGRESSION** - the behavior to which many hostile people are driven by the negative emotions of anger, irritation, and the like.

The questionnaire found in the book is composed of forty-six questions with only two possible answers. It is fairly easy to make a decision and a choice, although some thought may be necessary to do an honest self-evaluation. Each person who takes the survey has a score for cynicism, anger, and aggression. There are ranges of scores within each category.

### CYNICISM SCORES

- **0-3** - your cynicism is very low
- **4-6** - your cynicism level is probably high enough to be of some concern
- **7 or higher** - your cynicism level is very high

### ANGER SCORES

- **0-3** - your anger level is very low
- **4-6** - your anger level is probably high enough to deserve your attention
- **7 or higher** - your anger level is very high

### AGGRESSION SCORES

- **0-3** - your aggression level is very low
- **4-6** - your aggression level is borderline, and you may want to consider ways to reduce it
- **7 or higher** - you probably need to take serious steps to reduce your aggression level

### TOTAL HOSTILITY SCORE

To calculate the total hostility score, you add the scores for cynicism, anger, and aggression. The result can tell you whether or not your hostility level is below a level that is likely to place you at risk of developing health problems.

We all need to learn to control our anger so that we become better communicators. Some of us also need to learn to control anger so that we can live longer, happier, and healthier lives.

### We All Have Rights!

Below find a list of human rights. Honoring these for ourselves and for others will help us be better communicators. Accepting these rights will aid us in overcome inhibitions that prevent us from meeting our needs.

### Human Rights

There are many human rights listed in research studies. The following are most common:

- Your right to feel good about yourself in gracious, accepting ways.
- Your right to dignity and self respect when you do not violate the rights of others.
- Your right to refuse or say no without reproaching yourself or feeling guilty.
- Your right to make honest mistakes.
- Your right to have a range of feelings and voice them as long as you accept the responsibility.
- Your right to request information in order to make an informed decision.
• Your right not to respond immediately but to take the time to formulate a response.
• Your right not to perform at your peak level so that your life’s needs can be met.
• Your right to change your mind when you haven’t made a commitment.
• Your right to request that your needs be met as long as you do not take advantage of others.

Rules of Conversation

“If we do a reasonably nice job of getting along with people, we have probably learned the following rules of conversation”:

• Be direct: get to the point quickly.
• Be relevant: stick to the point.
• Be clear: avoid obscure and pretentious language.
• Be brief: give others a chance to talk; don’t give speeches or preach sermons.
• Be efficient: say what you must, and no more.
• Be sincere: say what you mean.
• Be civil: don’t interrupt or ignore the speaker.
• Be dignified: don’t be apologetic, over bearing, histrionic, silly or solemn.
• Be articulate: don’t mumble and don’t shout.
• Be attentive: gaze at your partners and lean toward them.

Remember conversation and cooperation: it takes two to talk.

Difficult People

Everyone of us has had to talk with a difficult person more than once in our lives. At times we have been that difficult person!

Below are four simple rules to help us to engage a difficult person:

1) Disarm/Diffuse - Do or say something to take the wind out of their hot air balloon; do not add fuel to their fire.

2) Empathize - Let them know and feel that you understand them and their circumstances, but don’t sympathize.

3) Gentle Questioning - Gently ask questions that will help you to understand how or why they feel as they do.

4) Don’t give advice - Don’t force your opinions or advice on others. People need to solve their own problems. You can only hope to give them the tools to solve their own problem or be a person for them to bounce their ideas and feelings from. If you give possible solutions and they decide to try them, you may be the victim of the blame if they are not successful.

Remember when dealing with difficult people:

• Keep your cool. Be assertive but not aggressive nor non-assertive.
• Listen actively, to understand them and to determine where they are coming from.
• Keep in mind that both you and the other person have human rights. Respect both.
• Use assertive messages; make it your goal to have them meet their needs and yours.
• Don’t stereotype anyone. Each person is an individual with his/her characteristics, past experiences, and behavioral pattern.

When you give feedback:

• Focus on the behavior, not the person.
• Give descriptions, not judgment.
• Pick a specific example, do not generalize.
• Offer feedback about the present, not the past.
• Share feelings, not advice.
• Don’t force feedback on the other person.
• Do not overload them with feedback.
• Focus feedback on something that they can change.

**Assertive Speakers Make Good Communicators**

The best communicators are those who are assertive. Remember not to be aggressive or non-assertive. Good communicators practice the following:

• Active Listening
• Assertiveness
• Use I messages
• Eliminate You messages
• Accept and Respect Human Rights

**What Does This Have to Do With Horse People?**

You may by now be asking yourself the question, what does all of this have to do with horse people? Exactly the point! Horse people are no different than any other group of people. Although horse people tend to be more independent than most, they are not more difficult to communicate with than any other interest group. We challenge each of you to help create the reputation that horse people are great communicators!

If each of us does what we can to increase the communication skill level of people within the horse industry, the industry will thrive!

We need to understand ourselves, so that we can understand others, so that we can all communicate better with each other. Communication is “What Makes the World Go Round”. If we all learn to communicate better the world will go around a lot smoother! Good luck!

**References**


4) Information from Education 501, Cornell University, Summer of 1995, taught by Dr. Marvin Glock.


**For Additional Information**


Acknowledgments

The Agriculture and New York State Breeding Development Fund - Program Sponsor

Computer Specialist - Karen Holcomb

Photographers - Mary Mudge and Jean Griffiths

Authors

Jean T. Griffiths
Extension Horse Specialist
Department of Animal Science
123 Morrison Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853
Telephone: 607-255-2857
E-mail - jtg4@cornell.edu

Marvin D. Glock
Professor Emeritus
Department of Education
117 Kennedy Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853
Telephone: 607-255-8603

Additional copies of this publication may be purchased from:

Cornell University
Joyce Dickens
Department of Animal Science
272 Morrison Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853
Phone - (607)255-2060
Fax - (607)255-9829
E-Mail - jmd10@cornell.edu

Animal Science Mimeo Series #196
Cost - $1.50

1998 Cornell University

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program employment opportunities.

Printed on recycled paper

Communicating With Horse People—Cornell University