

Long Live Leadership

By Kenda Lenseigne



Horse names that start with the letter, "B"... Go! Blue, Buddy, Buck..."We probably all know one of each. What we may not find when Googling the top 100 colt names is the one considered by some to be the most notable horse in history. His name was Bucephalus and was the horse of one of the greatest generals of all time, Alexander the Great. Alexander and Bucephalus's initial meeting was said to be less than auspicious. Initially, Bucephalus was brought to Macedonia and presented to King Phillip II, Alexander's father, in 346 BC. With a price tag of almost three times the going rate, the beautiful horse stood taller than the normal Macedonian steed, but was considered too wild and unmanageable, rearing up and striking anyone who came near him. King Phillip ordered him led away.

Young Alexander sat in the audience with his mother watching the spectacle before him. As the handlers tried to lead Bucephalus away, Alexander stood, calling them spineless. According to Plutarch's biography of Alexander, the young prince said, "What excellent horse do they lose for the lack of boldness to manage him?" King Phillip said to Alexander, "Do you accuse those who are older than yourself, as if you were better able to manage him?" Alexander,

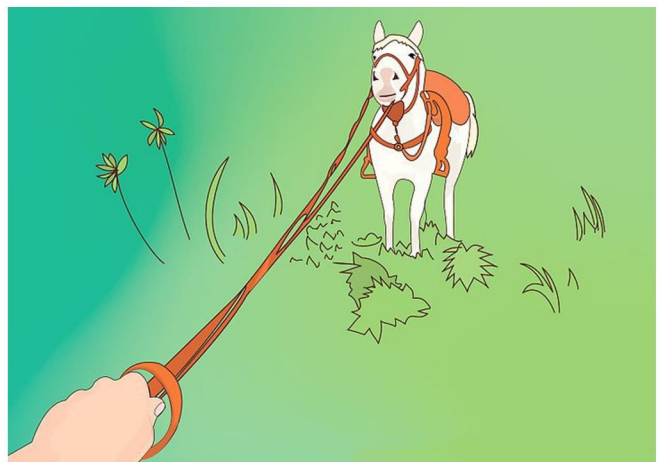
ignoring his father's remark, repeated his challenge and said he would pay for the horse if he, Alexander, were unable to tame him.

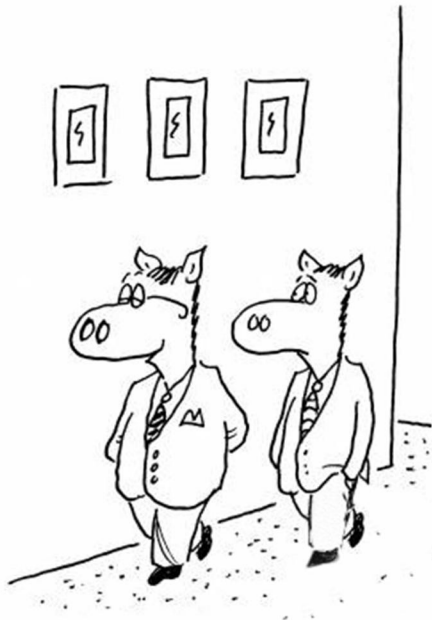
According to legend, Alexander approached the horse calmly, as he'd realized something the others had not --- the horse was afraid of his own shadow. Turning Bucephalus toward the sun so his shadow was behind him and slowly taking the reins in his hand, Alexander mounted him. The laughter of the crowd turned to cheers as Alexander rode off. Alexander established himself as a leader, providing a commanding presence so that Bucephalus would follow his directives.

Modern day horsemanship isn't that much different. It is necessary that we assume a leadership role by assessing our mount's abilities and strengths, and that we recognize his insecurities, be they shadows, balloons, or gunfire. Only then are we able to develop a relationship of confidence, boundaries and respect.

As we look at the nature of the *Equus Caballus*, aka Good Pony, Hay Burner, Nag, Bucket Head, there's a lot that's changed over the last several centuries in terms of how humans and horses relate to one another, but there is also a lot that hasn't. Many of us have seen first hand circumstances similar to what Alexander saw, though on a milder level. When we see an unruly horse overtake its handler or a horse that ignores the bit and runs back to the gate after the first five targets, we are seeing a problem in the horse/handler relationship.

No matter what era we look at in the horse-human relationship, we first have to acknowledge that horses remain prey and herd animals, as indicated by their grazing teeth, and eyes located on the sides of their heads. Humans are predator animals, with canine teeth, and eyes located in the front of our heads. We are clearly the ones who should be in charge... right?





**"A good leader can lead them to water, but
a great leader can also make them drink."**

What kind of leader are you?

Scenario #1: Are we the ones afraid of our own shadow?

There's a rogue balloon floating across the arena. We see it first before our horse and we tense up knowing that it's coming our way. Our horse, unaware of said balloon, feels our nervous energy and starts to dance around in anticipation of whatever changed in the saddle above. We grasp the reins; he chomps the bit. We squeeze our legs; his eyes widen. The balloon in question has caught the wind and is now headed in the opposite direction toward the next county and all this agony was for nothing. In this case of two fearful creatures feeding off one another, no one was leading.

Scenario #2: Is your horse afraid of its shadow because of unfair leadership?

A horse knocks over a barrel at the shoot and the pair loses the championship. In a sharp bit of frustration, the horse is forced to accept the brunt of the rider's temper. Maybe it was the horse that cheated the barrel, maybe it was the rider who rode him right into it - it's hard to assess when the pressure's high and there's adrenaline coursing through both horse and rider's veins. We've all seen folks who discipline their horses for doing something wrong, but often forget to apply the same degree of approval when they do something right. In that case, from the horse's perspective, he is having to go through the training process in a series of only negative responses.

Scenario #3: Is your horse afraid of its shadow because of lack of experience?

A horse has just arrived at a training barn, or to a new home after just being purchased. He's clearly nervous as he takes wobbly steps off the trailer. He's never been away from home or his "mama". His routine is upset, his yummy snack bucket is not brought to him at his normal time, and he is forced to get out of bed at 6 am to work. He's scared of everything

because he's never been exposed to anything outside of his own comfortable stall. A good leader will recognize this behavior by remembering what it was like to be dropped off at summer camp for the first time. She will also one read the insecurities and the intentions of the horse and build his confidence off of those things. A good leader will always know the difference between spoiled and scared.

The next time your horse becomes unmanageable for no apparent reason, ask yourself if you are providing the leadership this animal needs, or if you have neglected your responsibilities as the captain of his fate. There's a commonly accepted truth that people rise to the expectations of their leaders. In my experience, horses do, too.

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