



"What we ever hope to do with ease, we must first learn to do with diligence."

Samuel Johnson

Diligence, consistency, steadiness, reliability are all qualities that horses crave in their herd mates. Horse people are often taught that horses rely on consistency and we immediately perceive this to mean we must feed them at the exact same time every day or they will suffer some horrible fate. In fact, horses don't really care. They do learn resource guarding behaviors in domestic situations, so they do learn when it is feeding time and may exhibit guarding behaviors. However, what the horse really craves is the emotional side of all those words in the first sentence. Your horse wants to know that you will communicate in a relaxed manner, with your focus and intention, and your response to stress or outside stimuli will be consistent.

When you are riding, this means being very aware of your aids and being consistent with them. To make sure this is the case, you need to be relaxed enough and using good enough biomechanics to feel what YOU are doing. It also means being consistent with your corrections and being able to FEEL the moment your horse makes an effort, so you can release. Horses learn by the release of pressure, so the quicker you FEEL the right timing, the quicker they learn.

When you start working on these techniques, it is important to have a plan. Plan on what you will focus on in that ride. Plan on when you will take a second to check yourself. Will it be in every corner? Will it be twice on each side of the arena? Will it be at every orange cone you set up? As you notice your horse responding better and your brain not needing a reminder, reduce the number of reminders. Keep working until you feel like you can notice at any time that maybe something is off with YOU and you should check in, before you make another correction to your horse. This is YOUR responsibility as a rider, to be present and focused for your horse's sake.

One of my biggest pet peeves is, riders who adopt these strategies for a short period of time and then fall back into old habits or they just sort of use a strategy. Relaxation, focus, and diligence are basics and they should be used consistently. They should also be trained regularly. Even riders that have an innate sense of feel, should still work to better their skills, in my opinion. Some people will need to work on these principles every week (once they learn them) and some can focus on them a few times a year. You are not a better or a worse rider based on how many times you need to revisit these skills. You are an individual, just like your horse and you should treat yourself as such.

