

# True Equine Leadership: Exercises, Part 1 By Barbra Ann King



Angie and Barb

I am a firm believer in True Equine Leadership as taught by the Relationship Riding method. It is a method based on zero stress for both horse and rider. When horses see and trust you as they do their own herd leader, they willingly follow you everywhere, including into a trailer. Riding also becomes safer as you will be able to ride without domination or causing pain to obtain results (bitless).

**T** rue Equine Leadership starts on the ground and flourishes in the saddle. On the ground, there are six exercises that help you prove to your horse that you are a leader whom he can trust and respect. These six exercises are: Round Pen Conversation, Food Trials, Leading, Grooming, Picking Up Feet and Take My Space. Besides these exercises, there are also little things that we can do better in order to enhance and preserve the relationship we have, such as the way we put on a halter, what we do between putting on the halter and leading the horse to the barn, mounting/dismounting, etc.

## Round Pen Conversation

Most riders have had a chance to work or observe a round pen exercise with a horse. They push him around one way, then the other, and correct the horse if he shows them his back end.

My version of having a round pen conversation is quite different - you focus strictly on having the horse respect your personal space. This is done by creating a big bubble for yourself (the perimeter of the round pen) and making sure the horse doesn't come into your space as you move him around.

The horse does not have to run, but if you let him walk, make sure that it is an active walk and that the horse is paying attention to you. If not, push your horse to a trot, just enough for him to be focussed on you. If the horse panics and runs around with a high head, back off and stand in the middle of your space with your arms down and wait for your horse to calm down. Do not let him into your space.

When you are moving your horse around, make sure your toes and belly are pointing to the horse's tail and that the whip you use to establish your personal space is touching the ground. **Any whip that is held high is similar to using "shouty capitals" in an email.**

If your body is pointing to the front of your horse, he will stop and/or change direction because that is what your body language is indicating. A good trick to stay in the right position is to look at the horse's tail. Your body will naturally orient itself to where you are looking.

Keep in mind that your horse is the one that will decide if you are a True Equine Leader or not, no matter how much you think you are! Also, your horse will "ask" you every day if you are still a good leader. Don't take it personally, that's what he does with his own herd leader. You are not training your horse, you are communicating with him in a language that he understands.

*Barbra Ann King is an internationally known horse behaviour specialist, the founder of the Relationship Riding® method and a published author living in Alberta. She specializes in rehabilitating horses and optimizing performance. She travels year-round sharing her passion with like-minded horse owners and offers video consultations for troubleshooting through her website [www.relationshipriding.com](http://www.relationshipriding.com).*



Athena in training

In the next issue,  
I will explain how  
to do the Food  
Trial exercise.

Enjoy the journey!