



The 10-Second Rule

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"Our Horses, Our Teachers" Most of us are familiar with that saying. As a trainer, instructor and presenter I am often humbled by the horses I serve. The lessons they offer are never ending when we take the time to slow down and listen.

Riley, a 10-year old Cheval Canadian is one such teacher. I have known & worked with him since he was a 2 year old. He is an even tempered, quiet, sweet horse, whose biggest challenge has always been his lack of confidence. He has feared such things as; fly spray, the water hose, walking thru mud, trailer loading and obstacles on the trail. I have learned that positive reinforcement training, such as clicker training, is the easiest, less stressful and fastest way to help him (& many other horses) overcome most of these challenges.

While Riley has grown in leaps and bounds, he remains a very cautious horse. His reaction is to freeze until he feels safe. That may be once he has had time to process, is led in hand on the ground or when another horse goes past first.

I recently began experimenting with counting to 10 before I put any pressure on him when he freezes. It is working almost 100% of the time. Sometimes he is ready to go before "10" and so we proceed.

This approach prevents me from getting frustrated (because I know it is only the sun shining on a rock:) and immediately begin using pressure to try to move him on. I absolutely know that there is no amount of pressure that will move this horse forward until he feels safe enough to proceed.

I recently taught this method to a group of 4-H students in a horse agility workshop. One student said to me, "I will have to use my stick to get my horse to do this." I assured her that would not be necessary. These students didn't use sticks. They learned to support their horses through understanding, patience and kindness.

Riley has an amazing amount of try and does his best for me. He will proceed forward even when I can feel his heart racing. He is still building trust in me and so I must continue to be a patient, compassionate leader, giving him the few seconds he needs to feel safe.

Next time you find yourself in a "freeze" situation with your horse try counting to ten. Understand that their concern is real to them. Relax, breath and smile as you count. You'll feel better and I'm sure your horse will to.

I would love to hear if this method works for you. Shoot me an e-mail or send me a message!
Thanks! Ride safe & enjoy the journey!

(Note: If your horse is the spin, buck & run sort this method may not work. Moving his feet may be the answer. This is just one tool and I trust that you will know if it is worth trying with your specific horse and situation.)