

# DO LESS AND PROGRESS

A business owner wills himself to relax

By Joe Wolter

**W**hen I teach a clinic, I don't try to predict which rider and horse will make the most progress. For instance, at first I thought Andrew and Barbara were simply mismatched.

Andrew is an international insurance broker in charge of his own brokerage in London. Barbara is a horse employed by the 63 Ranch in Montana, part of a cavy that guests ride for enjoyment, to see the scenery or help work cattle.

Andrew is a natural leader in business, but he wasn't getting much respect from Barbara.

They are in constant, jerky motion. When they stop, Barbara flips her head and paws the dirt. Andrew's jaw is set like a drill sergeant. This is his vacation, and the ranch has 60 more solid, broke horses he can choose from. But he's set on Barbara.

His reins are pretty tight and he's working his hands all the time, trying to guide her.

I suggest that Andrew give her some slack and just let her go. Just direct, then release. Don't be so exacting in where you want to go, but how you get there. By how you get there, I mean on a loose rein and just traveling along together. This seems backward to Andrew, and a little frightening. Andrew isn't used to giving up control.

At first Barbara didn't know that Andrew wasn't going to confine her. It takes just a little while for her to get used to this new Andrew who isn't holding onto her head, but once she does, it feels good to both.

She's not flipping her head. But she's still just going, going, moving all the time,

like the Energizer Bunny without the rhythm. Then I notice Andrew's legs. He's kicking here and there, maybe trying to guide her, or bump her back in place when she steps out of line. No wonder Barbara's zigging like a pinball.

He stops kicking and Barbara smooths out, but she's still pacing. I think Andrew is unconsciously bracing his legs. Even

when he's not bumping her, she feels the brace in his legs. So I tell him to ride like he has no legs. He looks at me like I'm speaking Swahili. This part is hard to put into words.

Andrew needs to totally relax. The horse needs to feel like Alex is draped over her back, not clothes-pinned. Relax. When a horse acts skittish or upset, most people automatically tense up. Maybe they're self-conscious, because the horse's behavior calls attention to them. Maybe they're anticipating a wreck. But trust me, when you get nervous, you make the horse nervous.

Alex is successful in business because he has self-control. We watch him will his body to relax. And the minute we saw the tension ebbing out of him, it was like Barbara went, "Ahhhh," and breathed a sigh of relief.

A horseman has to be open-minded. Andrew could have just said, "I'm making the wrong thing difficult. I'm holding the reins tight so it's harder for her to sling her head or go to the corral. I'm bumping her with my leg when she steps out of line." But Andrew was willing to try something different, something that felt very foreign to him.

This new Andrew felt much less for-



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**When Andrew** changed, Barbara changed. She was more sensitive than he realized.

eign to Barbara. He relaxed and quit focusing so much on the outcome as what was taking place at the moment. Then she could relax. Barbara was trying harder to get along than anyone knew. She's a lot more sensitive than anybody knew.

Andrew quit trying to *make* the mare do anything and just kind of drifted with her. And after a while, she was drifting with him. Obviously, they can't just go drifting all over Montana, but this was a starting place, a new leaf.

But if Andrew hadn't changed, Barbara would have stayed the same.

Andrew's cues were much subtler after that, and he gave her time to respond. Their progress was remarkable, and everyone at the clinic made it a point to tell Andrew how amazed they were by Barbara's transformation.

Andrew told me later that he'd been riding Barbara on his 63 Ranch vacations for six years. "At least I thought I'd been riding her," he said. "Turns out she was just packing me around. Today I discovered how it feels to actually ride."

When I watch a rider start to come together with a horse, it just makes my day. ☼

Trainer **Joe Wolter** spent his life on ranches in California and Nevada, where he was influenced by some great horsemen, including Bill Dorrance.

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