

# LEADING FROM BEHIND



## Julia Felton introduces the fourth waterhole ritual as observed by Carolyn Resnick

The previous three rituals have helped you create a great bond, trust and respect with your horse, a solid relationship base on which you can build. You can now move on to Leading From Behind™ which develops a great work ethic in your horse and also adds what I call a gas pedal; it gets your horse to start thinking forward. This is a great exercise to do with a horse who lacks confidence and, along with the work ethic, the horse develops an optimistic attitude. If your horse enjoys learning before he starts any formal training, he will need a lot less guidance when he does.

The practice of Leading From Behind™ also causes your horse to gain a sense of belonging. Without tack, in a free, open environment, you allow your horse to respond positively or negatively without consequences, which is so valuable to building a connection and trust. When your horse accepts you leading him from behind, he will trust you more because it is a natural herd behaviour.

For a horse to express his feelings without consequences or concern and to feel a sense of who he is is life-enhancing, and the trick to winning him over. Exercising your instinct for horses and humans creates a sense of well being and enthusiasm for life as well as an optimistic attitude for working with others. Experiencing freedom of choice without consequences builds a healthy ego. A horse who has a healthy ego will naturally bond with a human.

Your horse's greatest instinct is for companionship and freedom. This is what we can give back to him by working with the Waterhole Rituals™. It is essential for your horse to experience a freedom of choice in order for him to feel well adjusted.

From the practice of Leading from Behind™ we are returning your horse to his roots, his well-being and his understanding of life, as we are building his trust with us. With the practice of Leading From Behind™, he will choose our leadership over his own and when

your horse finally accepts you herding him like a lead horse would, his character will evolve. This gives him an optimistic attitude and a desire for training. From clicker training to classical training, from Western to English, from bits to bitless, from liberty to tack, when we have a horse who enjoys learning with a willing heart from free choice, almost all things are possible. This is what the Waterhole Rituals™ are about.

The natural herd instinct that we are invoking when Leading From Behind™ is based on the premise that your horse will retreat from anything that's approaching and follow anything that's leaving.

Just think about it. In the wild a herd is comprised of a stallion, a lead mare and then a number of other mares and youngsters. The stallion positions himself at the back and rounds up the herd when danger is sighted. He also uses his position at the rear to keep order and respect and keep the herd safe. Leading his herd from the back is the

ultimate test of leadership for the stallion because if he pushes the mares too much they will just scatter. They have no fences or boundaries to contain them, so the stallion's leadership must balance the right mix of direction and support.

The lead mare is typically positioned at the front of the herd and from here she directs the herd to the best grazing and water. So the herd is accustomed to following anything that leaves, for example the lead mare, and retreat from anything approaching, for example the stallion pushing gently up behind the herd. This natural instinct keeps the herd flowing and moving in unity.

In his book *Dancing with Horses*, Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling also refers to these different leadership positions and explains the impact of each:

**Position One:** The area of greatest dominance is at the front. In this position the rest of the herd have minimal independence. They rely on the lead mare to take them

where they need to go. This is also the position that a mare would take with her foal. This is a very directive leadership position and the type of leadership that you might encounter when there is an emergency. The leader makes the request and everyone has to follow. It is non-negotiable.

**Position Two:** The least dominant position is at the side. Development of independence is possible within boundaries. This type of leadership has been described as "going down the pub with your friends".

**Position Three:** The leadership position of medium dominance is at the back but it is the optimum position to develop independence, self-responsibility and confidence. When this position is adopted by a high ranking member of the herd, such as the stallion, they are able to maintain great dominance through their personality. The greatest advantage of this leadership position is that it relies on the leader setting the direction and then letting the herd get there however they want. This is a very empowering leadership position for the herd members as it gives them choice.

We can observe these different leadership styles being used in the workplace as well!

As a trainer when you practice Leading From Behind™, you are causing your horse to accept your leadership in a natural way that he is instinctively familiar with. Lead stallions use it for rounding up the herd and moving them to new locations for safety and

greener pastures. Mares use it when the herd is not on the move to keep the members focused and respectful of her presence. All horses use it when the herd is on the move. I believe this is how pecking order got started. All horses know how to lead from behind, and the ones that are best at it are highest in rank.

When a new horse enters a herd, typically after the initial introductions, he will allow the other herd members to lead him from behind. In doing so the new herd member indicates that he is willing to be directed by the others. A horse's need for companionship is so strong that being accepted into the herd is key to his survival, however, once he has been accepted he will find his place in the hierarchy by taking territory on other herd members when they are not paying attention. To be caught off guard and not paying attention is humiliating for any horse and in doing so they lower their rank as they demonstrate that they cannot be trusted.

If we refer to the leadership positions above, we mostly lead our horse in position two. This is a supportive leadership position with neither party really leading the dance. There is a deep connection that can come from being in this heart-felt space but unless you work on Leading From Behind™, your horse can become over-reliant on your supportive presence which can lead to challenges whilst riding.

Leading From Behind™, is like riding your horse because in both cases your horse is stepping out on his own and being directed by

you. He must trust in himself and accept your leadership without seeing you. If your horse knows that you can make great decisions and influence him, even when he cannot directly see you then his flight response is less likely to get activated if something spooks him.

When your horse gives up his resistance to Leading From Behind™ he develops a desire to be responsible and wants to follow your

lead. The practice of this ritual takes the aggressive behaviour out of a horse; as well as causing a shy horse to feel more secure from the structure it offers.



Julia Felton is the only Carolyn Resnick instructor in Europe.  
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## RITUAL FOUR LEADING FROM BEHIND

To start, you want to go to the front of your horse and ask him to turn around in the direction you want him to go. Any time your horse gives you his nose, tell his nose where to go. Begin by stepping toward his nose and use an action like a policeman would do directing traffic. Use intent and enough gusto to affect the speed you would like the horse to go, which is slowly and sweetly. Start with the energy it would take to shoo baby chicks back to the hen house. When he walks around you follow him in a passive way. Use your body and intent to vitalise your core energy and focus on his nose moving in the direction you want him to go.

Keep the rhythm relaxed. In the beginning your horse will find it very strange that you are asking him to move in this way, so only ask for a few steps then walk away and enjoy hanging out together. Later ask again, this time take more steps and build up gradually. If your horse runs away, just amble after him keeping your same, steady pace and when you get to him, reconnect and start over.

When Leading From Behind™ you don't want to be directly behind your horse but rather off his hip at a 45 degree angle. Your positioning will depend on the direction you wish him to go in. You can practice this ritual on a daily basis in the field for short periods of time and soon you will find that your horse will stop and trot off your body language. Once your horse can do this, graduating to long lining becomes very straightforward.

*Position yourself  
at a 45 degree  
angle off his hip*

