

# Horsemanship for Women... It's Not What You Think!

By Karen Scholl

It starts as a childhood dream for many women... having a horse of our very own. This horse from our dreams is our dearest friend and gentlest companion. At first sight, our dream horse calls excitedly to us, leaving food and friends just to be with us. We ride astride this gentle giant over hill and dale, knowing that our friend is taking good care of us in every adventure we can imagine... then we buy our first horse!

For many of us, our dream horse somehow became less than dreamy along the way. We get along pretty well, but when conditions change, resistance, confusion and frustration are predictable outcomes and we quickly learn to avoid those situations if at all possible. For example, many people will ride inside an arena but not outside, with a small group but not large groups, and never on a windy day! It's common to avoid trailering unless absolutely necessary and many people dread when their horse will need shots, shoes or treatment for an injury.

If you have what I describe as a 'conditional relationship' with your horse, you're part of one of the largest groups in the horse industry. The good news is... it doesn't have to be this way.

Our childhood dream of that special friendship with a horse in any situation can be realized when we understand two things: First, that this special relationship is possible in spite of what other people say. Second, the key to moving beyond the barriers you may be experiencing today lies in expanding your knowledge about horses.

The reason most people don't expand their knowledge with horses is that they really don't know that things could be any different. Because it's human nature to think the horse just acts that way and it's a woman's nature to avoid conflict, it's no wonder that horses have us trained just the way they like us!

If you don't believe me, ask your horse for something outside of your routine like back them through a gate or into their stall and observe their response to doing something new or different. Most horses, certainly not all, will demonstrate some form of resistance to being asked something different or unfamiliar, but isn't this what our real goal is with horses... to do anything, anywhere, anytime... and have fun doing it?

If any of this seems a bit familiar, read on!

Horsemanship for Women is a program that teaches in three stages; leadership, confidence and trust. As young girls, we're generally not taught leadership skills, rather,

we're encouraged to be supportive of others. How this affects us with our horse is that in absence of leadership, a horse will naturally make all the decisions. With a very large, powerful animal making the decisions, it seems logical that we should be more in a 'negotiating' role with the horse. This is when we find ourselves in the 'conditional relationship' and not knowing what else to do.

Their 'leadership ladder' is a natural mechanism in the herd designed for the survival of prey animal species. The leader of the herd is the very horse that all the other horses are naturally attracted to. Horses establish leadership with very clear 'postures of pressure' that cause others to move their feet. These behaviors can appear aggressive or even mean, especially to women, but they are the same postures a mother horse uses to direct her newborn foal. It's simply how horses communicate with each other.

By first shifting our awareness to recognize patterns of behavior, we can then learn how to interact with a horse in a way that they understand, respect and respond to. Horses are gregarious by nature so they truly enjoy our interactions when they can understand and do what we want.

What women discover is that leadership is a learnable skill with qualities that do not include dominant, aggressive, controlling, get-er-done attitudes toward the horse. When we learn to communicate what's important to us, clearly define our boundaries and express genuine appreciation for their effort, horses instantly recognize in us a difference that they are naturally attracted to.

Regardless of your current situation, never, ever give up on your dream with horses. Instead of listening to that voice of discouragement, look elsewhere for more knowledge. Your horse will appreciate your efforts and will reward you with the greatest feeling of connection... a feeling you may have long given up on... until now.

*Karen Scholl is an equine behaviorist and educator. Her program, Karen Scholl, Horsemanship for Women, is accessible in hands-on courses, workshops and video. More information is available through [www.karenscholl.com](http://www.karenscholl.com) or 888-238-3447.*