

# Bond With Your Horse

By Karen Scholl

Years ago in a life skills seminar, we were asked to write down the qualities of our ideal mate. You can imagine the extensive list of wonderful attributes I thought this person should have. The next task stopped most people in their tracks when we were asked to write down the qualities one would have to possess in order to attract a person like this! So often our attention is on the behavior of another with very little reflection on ourselves.

Applied to horses, this very simple skill of self reflection is the key to unlocking the secret to bonding with your horse. One of the most common problems people want help with is when their horse becomes upset when separated from the herd. Horses become vocal and agitated, with behavior ranging from disruptive to downright dangerous. So if a horse can be that bonded to other horses, what qualities might we need so they'll bond this strongly to us?

You guessed it, the qualities of another horse, and not just any horse, the lead horse. In nature, their very survival depends on this bond to the lead horse of the herd. This is why the three key ingredients to creating a bond with horses are leadership, confidence and trust. Leadership is a learnable skill that is often uncomfortable especially for women. Because we have a "nature to nurture," there is a tendency to treat horses like big puppy dogs. We know this doesn't work, but the alternatives people tell us seem even worse!

Many aspects of my teaching 'horsemanship for women' draw from the similarities in raising children and our tendencies of behavior with other human relations. For example, I'll ask an audience to raise their hand if they've ever felt like a doormat. As most women in the audience raise their hand, we can all see that this is challenge very common to women. Then I ask whose fault is it when we've reached this point?! In this moment, we have the opportunity to understand that much of our lack of leadership is due to societal programming. Because we've been taught to "be nice or they won't like us," it can be very difficult to even think how we'd ever be comfortable in the leadership role with a horse.

The good news is that there is a simple way to demonstrate 'loving leadership' that is very attractive to horses because they feel safe and secure. When a horse no longer fears a person or situation, their true playful and gregarious nature emerges. This is when a horse views us as an honored member of their herd and bonding begins.

**Confidence** naturally emerges as leadership skills replace fear and avoidance. Knowing how to communicate from a position of leadership opens new doors on your way to realizing your dream of bonding with your horse. The only way I know to develop confidence with anything is to just go give it your best effort. It is in our nature to avoid difficulties, so we develop a conditional relationship with our horse. We only ride inside the arena, with a buddy horse, in familiar surroundings, and never on a windy day! If you have limitations like these with your horse, you've probably tried different approaches well meaning people have suggested, but for some reason they haven't worked for you. Fear is a mechanism designed for survival and is very useful until it becomes debilitating.

When I read the book, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, I understood that fear of anything new or different is natural, but in order to become more familiar or more confident in a situation, we can learn to move through this natural state of fear to facilitate the change we desire. To me, the opposite of fear is knowledge. As we gain more knowledge through study and experience, there is no room for fear. You may find that as you gather more successes with your horse you'll enjoy gaining even more knowledge than you had ever dreamed possible. What a feeling it is to have confidence with horses!

**Trust** is what you and your horse will give to each other as your leadership and confidence continue to grow. Without leadership and confidence from us, a horse cannot trust us for their survival. Many people express a lack of trust with their horse, but it's been my experience that this lack of trust is mutual. When a horse spooks, bolts, bucks or resists, they don't trust us. As we expand our leadership skills and gain more confidence, these issues naturally resolve themselves. You gain more trust in your horse as they gain more trust in you!

We all want to bond with our horse, but that will never happen if we keep treating them like a dog! The horse will bond with us when we learn to treat them how the horse would prefer. Leadership, confidence and trust are the three ingredients that give you the skills to create that special bond with your horse, and it's a feeling you'll never forget! This approach is a little different, but the results with your horse are immediate. Every aspect of Horsemanship for Women feels natural and compelling, so if you've ever felt like you "just don't get it," maybe it's time to try something a little different! Enjoy *your* journey!

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Karen Scholl is a horse behaviorist and clinician, teaching "Karen Scholl, Horsemanship for Women" throughout the U.S. Learn more about this empowering program by visiting [karenscholl.com](http://karenscholl.com) or call for a free brochure at 888-238-3447.