

*"This is a book for those who seek a mutually satisfying relationship with their horses. The Principles provide a road map...we should read them carefully and often."*

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# THE COMPASSIONATE EQUESTRIAN

ALLEN M. SCHOEN, DVM, MS, AND SUSAN GORDON



## 25 PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY When Caring for and Working with Horses

### HORSE SHOPPING: A TRAINER'S OPPORTUNITY FOR COMPASSION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

As head instructor and barn owner of Inner Circle Farm in Patterson, New York, Laura Parker has 38 years of serious and professional experience in loving and learning with horses. She is the former Assistant Director of Riding at Pace University in New York and acquired her Master's Degree from NYU in motor learning and kinesiology, which has greatly benefited her students because of her understanding of the human body in motion. She studies and teaches classical dressage, and is one of Dr. Schoen's clients. Here she shares one story of a trainer's responsibility when helping match human and horse.

"In the course of a career, trainers have a unique opportunity to assist their clients in the purchase of a horse," says Parker. "The honor and responsibility of this position I do not take lightly. I recently was blessed to be a part of the joy once again of uniting two souls, human and equine.

"In this case, my new student had sadly experienced a true lack of compassion and consciousness on the part of her first dressage trainer. This lovely and sincere young woman had waited a very long time but had finally the means to purchase a quality, well-trained horse. Her former trainer quickly guided her to the purchase of a horse that although beautiful was riddled with physical problems that made riding him extremely difficult. Even though she questioned whether it was appropriate to ride him due to his physical issues, she was made to feel that her novice riding skills were at fault.

"The opportunity to field such a request by a student is always a dream come true for me: Someone really interested in learning with the financial means to support and care for a horse, who at the same time is giving a horse a chance at a loving supportive partnership.

"As dreams do come true, my student's first horse is here with us, feeling and looking like a different being, muscled, relaxed and appreciating the original intention this wonderful woman had for him. He is now being worked only within

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his comfort zone and is treated with the healing modalities necessary. Meanwhile, my student's new tall, dark, and handsome riding partner—physically capable of teaching her and developing continuously himself—is a daily reminder of how compassion and consciousness is a choice in every crevice of the horse world."

Even horses used in recreational activities such as trail riding are susceptible to injury if worked especially hard on weekends then left standing around during the week with no additional exercise. As we touched upon in the previous chapter, compassionate training and riding encompasses a fundamental understanding of the biomechanics of the horse's musculoskeletal system. There are limits to the duration and intensity of workouts given the horse's stage of development. And as we've also discussed previously, it has been confirmed that horses have a weight-bearing load tolerance (see p. 83). Riders are cautioned to be aware of exceeding the horse's comfort zone and ability to carry their weight plus tack without doing spinal damage. It is up to each individual to be truthful regarding his or her own level of competence in approaching any method of riding as it relates to equine development so as to do no harm to the horse.

It is in the best interest of the horse if we place compassion at the base for our training, whether for competition or recreational purposes, and remain open to new ways this objective might be met. When we take our ego out of the equation, at least to the degree that it is not the dominating reason behind our equestrian activity, we expand our field of vision to that of observing—not judging—the industry at large and the welfare of *all* equines. To refer to "all training methods" as Principle 10 suggests, is quite encompassing, and the view can be disturbing in some cases. For our own well-being, we are positively affected by establishing a calm, clear state of mind with which to approach and interact with horses and other horsepeople. If we strive to maintain that state, we will inevitably inspire and educate others to do so, as well.