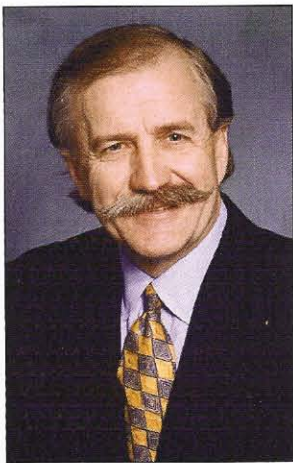


# trainer responsibilities



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LAST MONTH I WROTE ABOUT THE HORSE OWNER'S RESPONSIBILITIES IN AVOIDING training disputes. This month I will focus on the trainer's responsibilities.

## SET REALISTIC GOALS

**L** Many training disputes between owners and trainers can be avoided by setting realistic goals. Owners very often have aspirations for their horses that are unrealistic because they are emotionally attached to the horse and are unable to be objective in their evaluation. It is the trainer's responsibility as a professional to be honest in his appraisal. That is not to say that the trainer should not encourage setting high goals with the owner, rather the goals should be realistically attainable. Before the trainer accepts an owner as a client, he should sit down with him and find out what he expects from the relationship. If the expectations are out of line with reality, the trainer should say so in no uncertain terms. The trainer should educate and explain to the prospective client why the goals are unrealistic and modify the goals so they can be met. If the owner is insistent on setting goals that are unreachable the trainer is well advised not to accept him as a client. To do otherwise is to invite disputes later in the relationship. Perhaps most importantly, setting reasonable expectations at the outset of the relationship will advance the trainer's reputation as an honest professional.

## KEEP THE OWNER INFORMED

The trainer should keep the owner informed. Periodic telephone calls, e-mail messages or even a hand written note on the monthly bill can go a long way in developing a sense of partnership between owner and trainer. It should go without saying that all telephone messages (nowadays even text messages) should be returned as promptly as possible. After all, the owner is paying substantial amounts of money for the trainer's services and the owner is entitled to periodic reports to evaluate the progress of his horse. Keeping the lines of communication open, honest and regular will avoid potential misunderstandings and hard feelings when the inevitable bit of bad news has to be reported.

If and when there is that bit of bad news to be reported, the trainer should inform the owner sooner rather than later. If the bad news turns out to be even worse news later, the owner will rightfully question the trainer's judgment, or worse yet, his honesty. For example, if the client's horse is having an ongoing problem in training, or perhaps turns up three-legged lame overnight, the owner should be informed. First of all, the owner has a right to know, and second, the owner should have some input about how to resolve the issue. Although the trainer should certainly offer his expert advice and opinion to the owner, the final decision should be made jointly.

## BILL PROMPTLY AND ITEMIZE

Sometimes, especially during hectic show schedules, trainers neglect to bill their customers regularly. That is a mistake to be avoided. First, it disrupts your cash flow. Second, it causes problems with the owner because he may not have two or three months worth of cash immediately available to pay the bill, so payment may be delayed. Moreover, when a customer gets an unexpectedly large bill, he is more likely to question the various items in the bill, in hopes of reducing the total amount. To avoid this situation, the trainer should bill at least monthly. The trainer should have a bookkeeper or some other dependable person to assist in the billing process if he is unable to do so himself.

Owners should also be provided with itemized bills. There is nothing more frustrating to an owner than getting a generic bill stating "Training and Showing" for an unusually large amount without any explanation or detail. An itemized bill shows that the trainer is open, honest and professional in his billing practices. In addition, it gives the owner a better sense of the trainer's out of pocket costs advanced on behalf of the owner, as well as the actual level of professional services rendered.

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