



The Ripple Effect of Teasing: Unpacking the Impact

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Dealing with drama in the barn – and at shows – can be challenging and stressful. Whether it's conflicts between boarders, disagreements with the barn manager,

issues with horse care, or show nerve blow-outs, humor is a powerful social tool, capable of fostering connections, breaking down barriers and providing much-needed relief

from life's challenges —especially barn challenges. There are times at the barn when we know that if we don't laugh, we will surely cry and, face it, horses and the situations they place us in are often comical.

However, there's a fine line between playful banter and hurtful teasing. What may have started as gentle nudging can quickly turn. When an individual becomes the target of a joke, the repercussions can extend far beyond the initial laughter. This article delves into the profound effects of being the brunt of a joke and unpacks the consequences of teasing while shedding light on the emotional, psychological and interpersonal consequences that often go unnoticed. I'll also provide some suggestions to turn that lack of awareness and negativity into something positive that can help bring your barn family together.

The Initial Impact

At first glance, a teasing joke might appear harmless and just a bit of lighthearted humor among friends or colleagues. However, for the person at the receiving end, the experience may start out funny but the outcome can be quite different. Have you ever been the brunt of "group tease" that had run its course of being comical (at least to you!) and you just wished they would give it up already? Teasing can trigger feelings of embarrassment, shame and humiliation, which can erode an individual's self-esteem and self-confidence. As trainers, we want to lift others up and let everyone know they are worth it; they are perfect enough. Make sure that your teasing is gentle and watch for cues and clues that it's time to turn to nurturing.

An Emotional Roller Coaster

Teasing can stir up a whirlwind of emotions within the targeted individual. Over time, these emotions can evolve into resentment, anger or sadness. Psychologically, teasing can erode an individual's self-esteem and

confidence. This psychological toll can have long-lasting effects on a person's mental well-being, potentially leading to anxiety, depression or even self-destructive behaviors.

Physiologically, teasing can trigger stress responses in the body and individuals may experience an elevated heart rate, increased blood pressure, and heightened levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. These physiological reactions not only impact immediate well-being but can also contribute to long-term health issues.

Another unwanted outcome of over-the-top teasing extends beyond the targeted individual. Witnessing someone being brought down creates a toxic environment around the barn that perpetuates negativity and diminishes empathy within social circles. This behavior becomes normalized and may encourage others to engage in similar actions toward different individuals.

Impact on Relationships

Beyond the individual's emotional well-being, being the brunt of a teasing joke can strain relationships. What might start as good-natured ribbing can escalate into a pattern of hurtful behavior that damages trust and respect. In group dynamics, the individual might withdraw to avoid becoming a target, missing out on valuable social interactions with barn friends and colleagues or cause them to limit time with their horses.

As professional trainers, we want to be sure we help our students become the best they can be physically and emotionally. We know that horses can have a positive effect on people and we should strive to make the barn a safe haven and welcoming place for all. Team building activities like a stall-side pizza party or a build-your-own-sundae event can bring together trainers, students, boarders and staff in a stress-free environment and we horse people tend to love food *and* a party.

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Self-Perception and Identity

Teasing jokes have the potential to shape how an individual perceives themselves. Being consistently nudged about a particular trait or characteristic can result in internalizing that negative perception. This phenomenon, known as the “teasing identity,” can lead to a skewed self-image and hinder personal growth. Some individuals may develop resilience and a sense of humor as defense mechanisms while others may view this gentle ridicule as micro-aggression and become preoccupied with trying to avoid further focus while sacrificing their authenticity and growth.

When our natural reaction is to tease, it can create a ripple effect that perpetuates negativity and potentially harms others.

However, we have the power to break this cycle and choose more positive ways to express ourselves. Instead of teasing, we can practice empathy and understanding. Taking the time to listen and validate others' feelings allows for open communication and promotes a sense of unity. Additionally, offering genuine compliments or words of encouragement can uplift and create an atmosphere of positivity.

Another alternative is using humor in a lighthearted manner that doesn't target or belittle others. Playful banter can still bring joy without causing harm or discomfort.

Expressing gratitude and appreciation for others is a powerful way to break the cycle of teasing. Recognize your students' strengths, accomplishments and unique qualities, and let them know how much they are valued. This not only boosts their self-esteem but also encourages a more supportive and uplifting environment for everyone involved.

Promoting positivity through acts of kindness can have a profound impact on breaking the ripple-effect cycle of teasing. Compliment others genuinely, lend a helping hand when needed or engage in uplifting conversations that uplift others' spirits. Volunteer together as a group outside of the barn to encourage team-building and to foster good feelings.

Natural Laws of the Mind

In my book, “Perfect Enough,” I discuss the Natural Laws of the Mind. These laws describe the unequivocal truths about how our minds work and can help you understand and redirect how you engage with your students.

Law #1 is “What You Think is What You Get.” When teasing is allowed to continue unabated, the brunt of the “joke” begins to believe what is being said about them because an image placed

in the subconscious mind develops into reality with absolute accuracy. Therefore, someone's idea of a joke may take up residence in your client's head. Change the script to one of positivity to stop those negative thought processes.

Law #2 is "Every Thought Causes a Physical Reaction." Your thoughts affect all the functions of your body and could lead to increased adrenaline in the body, anxiety, fear and even ulcers. It's a law that you will become what you dwell upon. No joke is worth harming someone physically.

Law #3 is "Imagination is More Powerful Than Knowledge." Reason is easily overruled by imagination. The person being teased may imagine that what you've said is, indeed, true, and since imagination is more powerful than the knowledge that you

mean it as a joke, she will believe what her imagination tells her.

Law #4 is "Your Habits Are Your Life." If you are a jokester or lean toward sarcasm, perhaps today is the day you can begin to change those habits and become a positive influence in someone's life.

Law #5 is "Don't Breed Negative Thoughts." This means that the more you concentrate on your failures, the more likely you are to fail. And once those thoughts become firmly entrenched in your mind, your body will begin to create the behavior to support your thoughts. Strive to be the riding instructor who plants thoughts that can lead to their success.

Law #6 is "Attitude is a Matter of Choice." This is the way you look at life. You can

choose to change your attitude and change your life as well as your students' lives.

Law #7 is "Reactions Must Be Managed," meaning that just as you can manage your attitude, you can manage your reactions.

Law #8 is "Thoughts Must Be Kept Alive." Your mind cannot hold a thought and simultaneously hold an opposing thought. In other words, only one idea can be entertained at a time. But the longer a thought remains in your head, the more opposition there is to replace it with a new idea. So, don't subject your barn friends to long-term teasing; you don't want those negative thoughts to take up permanent residence in their head.

Law #9 is "Have an Attitude of Gratitude." What you put forth comes back to you, and

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usually when it does it has gained mass and momentum. In other words, what goes around come around. Therefore, if you develop an attitude of gratitude and look at life in terms of all you have to be grateful for, you'll start seeing more to be grateful for, focusing on positive things and more positive things will then be attracted to you.

In "Manifest Your Destiny," a book by Dr. Wayne Dyer published by Harper Collins in 1997, he writes, "Gratitude is a way of experiencing the world with love rather than judgement." Try having your own profound attitude of gratitude and radiate that love throughout your barn.

Breaking the Cycle

It is crucial for your barn family as a whole to recognize the detrimental effects of teasing and work toward fostering an environ-

ment that promotes kindness, respect and inclusivity. Aim toward uplifting rather than tearing down. It's important to recognize the impact of words and actions on others. Consider the Natural Laws of the Mind and take some of my suggestions to heart. Remember, breaking the ripple-effect cycle of teasing requires conscious effort and self-awareness. By choosing positive ways to express yourself, you can contribute toward building healthier relationships based on respect, empathy, humor and gratitude.

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