

Dear Horse,

I love you very much and I truly cherish your presence in my life. I would never wish to criticize you in any way. However, there are a few trivial details regarding our relationship that I think might bear your consideration.

First of all, I am already aware that horses can run faster than I can. I do not need you to demonstrate that fact each time I come to get you in the pasture. Please remember that I work long and hard to earn the money to keep you in the style to which you have become accustomed. In return, I think you should at least pretend to be glad to see me, even when I'm carrying a bridle instead of a bucket of oats.

It should be fairly obvious to you that I am a human being who walks on only two legs. I do not resemble a scratching post. Do not think that, when you rub your head against me with 1,000 pounds of force behind it, I believe that it wasn't your intention to send me flying. I am also aware that stomping on my toes while you are pushing me around is nothing but adding injury to insult.

I understand I cannot expect you to cover your nose when you sneeze, but it would be appreciated if you did not inhale large amounts of dirt and manure prior to aiming your sneezes at my face and shirt. Also, if you have recently filled your mouth with water you do not intend to drink, please let it all dribble from your mouth BEFORE you put your head on my shoulder. In addition, while I know you despise your deworming medication, my intentions in giving it to you are good, and I really do not think I should be rewarded by having you spit half of it back out onto my shirt.

Sometimes, I get the feeling that you are confused about the appropriate roles you should play in various situations. One small bit of advice: Your stone-wall imitation should be used when I am mounting and your speed-walker imitation when I suggest that we proceed on our way, not vice versa. Please also understand that jumping is meant to be a mutual endeavor. By "mutual", I mean that we are supposed to go over the jump together. You were purchased to be a mount, not a catapult.

I know the world is a scary place when your eyes are on the sides of your head, but I did spend a significant amount of money to buy you, and I have every intention of protecting that investment. Therefore, please consider the following when you are choosing the appropriate behavior for a particular situation: When I put your halter on you, attach one end of a lead rope to the halter, and tie the other end of the lead rope to a post or rail or whatever, I am indicating a desire for you to remain in that locale. I would also like the halter, lead rope, post, etc., to remain intact. While I admit that things like sudden loud noises can be startling, I do not consider them to be acceptable excuses for repeatedly snapping expensive new lead ropes (or halters or posts) so that

you can run madly around the barn area creating havoc in your wake. Such behavior is not conducive to achieving that important goal that I know we both share --- decreasing the number of times the veterinarian comes out to visit you.

By the same token, the barn aisle was not designed for the running of the Kentucky Derby and is not meant to serve as a racetrack. Dragging me down the aisle in leaps and bounds is not how "leading" is supposed to work, even if someone happens to drop a saddle on the floor as we're passing. Pulling loose and running off is also discouraged (although I admit it does allow you to run faster).

I assure you that blowing pieces of paper do not eat horses. While I realize you are very athletic, I do not need a demonstration of your ability to jump 25 feet sideways from a standing start while swapping ends in midair, nor am I interested in your ability to emulate both a racehorse and a bucking bronco while escaping said piece of paper. Also, if the paper were truly a danger, it would be the height of unkindness to dump me on the ground in front of it as a sacrificial offering to expedite your escape.

When I ask you to cross a small stream, you may safely assume that said stream does not contain crocodiles, sharks, or piranhas, nor will it be likely to drown you. (I have actually seen horses swimming, so I know it can be done. ) I expect you to be prepared to comply with the occasional request to wade across some small body of water. Since I would like to be dry when we reach the other side of the stream, deciding to roll when we're halfway across is not encouraged behavior.

I give you my solemn oath that the trailer is nothing but an alternate means of transportation for distances too long for walking. It is not a lion's den or a dragon's maw, nor will it magically transform into such. It is made for horses, and I promise you that you will indeed fit into your assigned space. Please also bear in mind that I generally operate on a schedule, and wherever we're going, I would really like to get there today.

For the last time, I do not intend to abandon you to a barren, friendless existence. If I put you in a turn-out pen, I promise that no predators will eat you, and I will come back in due time to return you to your stall. It is not necessary to run in circles, whinny pathetically, threaten to jump the fence, or paw at the gate. Neither your stall mates nor I will have left the premises. The other horses standing peacefully in adjacent pens amply demonstrate that it is possible to enjoy being turned out for exercise.

In order to reassure you, my dear horse, I have posted the following message on your stall door:

"Notice to People Who Complain About My Horse"

- 1) I like my horse a lot better than I like people who complain about him.
- 2) To you, he's an animal; to me, he's a big, hairy, four-legged child --- and you know what they say about coming between a mother and her children.
- 3) This stall is his castle, and you are expected to treat him as the king he thinks he is.
- 4) If you don't want him to steal your carrots, don't walk by him with the carrots sticking out of your pockets.
- 5) Horses are better than husbands or kids. They eat grass, don't smoke or drink, don't expect an allowance, don't voluntarily get their body parts pierced, don't hog the remote, don't waste the whole weekend watching football with their friends, don't talk back to you, don't compare you unfavorably with their friends' owners, don't keep you awake with their snoring --- and no horse ever left the toilet seat up after going to the bathroom.

In closing, my strong and gentle companion, I would like to point out that, whatever might happen between horses and their people, we humans will always love you. In fact, our bonds with you help create new bonds among ourselves, even with total strangers. Wherever there are horses, there will be "horse people," and for the blessings you bestow upon us, we thank you.

Most sincerely yours,

Your "Owner