

Racehorses and Plow Horses

by Dr. Larry Craft

Last year my wife and I got the chance to see the Clydesdales in person near our home. They arrived in trailers after a long trip. They patiently waited to leave the confines of their trailers, and finally after the wagons were built, they were gently led down the exit ramps to a huge crowd that waited only five to ten feet away from them. When they were in front of the crowds, their became more lively and animated, obviously enjoying the experience (and the freedom). But they were still easily controlled by their trainers, even with all the noise and disruptions from hundreds of fans who were applauding and taking close-up pictures. They stood gently by as they were hitched to the wagons. The process took over an hour from exit to hitching, yet they were most patient with the process.

As the narrator told their story, we learned how they were selected for their easy-going, laid-back temperament and their ability to handle the repetitive process as they traveled hundreds of miles from one venue to another. They were also selected for the way they interacted with the crowds; the way they enjoyed the experience. Said simply, the Clydesdales were easy-going, laid-back, extraverts. Liability was a significant issue with the owners since these huge draft horses weigh over 2,000 pounds and could seriously hurt bystanders or children if they were to lose control. They had to be patient and confident in their interactions. They had to handle the day-to-day routines and be coachable, just like the Plow Horses that helped build our farming industry.

Anyone who has worked with draft horses knows they don't have the intense, goal-oriented temperament of a Racehorse. The difference is genetically based; bred into them over the centuries. We don't put Racehorses behind a plow or Plow Horses on the racetrack.

Plow Horses may be more easily trained and patient in the learning process, but they lack the dynamic to go “outside the box”, find the buyer, and close the sale quickly. Racehorses, on the other hand, are goal-oriented (not process oriented) and crave the victories early in their career. They have to be coached differently (carrot on the stick), not paced like the Plow Horses.

Both can be successful, based on the job description. Plow Horses are better at customer service selling while Racehorses are better at commissioned outside sales positions. **Knowing the difference here can prevent significant losses if the company’s compensation system requires a quick-start and early success.**