



— Horses will do what horses will do. You've done your utmost best by walking alongside the student, the patient, or the family member to lead them to the proverbial water. In the end, they still refuse to drink from the fountain of your guidance, wisdom, and support. While this might provoke frustration or disbelief - or worse - we have many choices in what to do when the inevitable happens.

Life provides us with a lot of practical horse examples. Students can be provided with all the best guidance on how to succeed in coursework. Oftentimes, they refuse to heed the warnings, making choices for a variety of reasons that ultimately may not bode well. The same phenomenon exists with patients - who may refuse to listen to our guidance regardless of our years (or decades) of clinical experience. And of course, it goes without saying that we hope that family members, be they our parents or our siblings, would act upon the guidance of their trained professional children, right?

The common theme is two-fold. First, horses all make decisions based on their own internal mental representations. These representations are inclusive of prior experiences, self-efficacy, and self-perception. Second, when those decisions are made by the horse, we have to hope that those decisions don't generate any significant ramifications that we may have projected would happen in the first place.

When you're invested in the outcome, sincerely wanting to support, guide, and put your best foot forward, it can feel uncomfortable leading that horse to water and then being forced to watch them remain thirsty. But what I've learned is that there are several important aspects to keep in mind:

**1. Respect autonomy.** I respect that you have the right to make your own decisions. I may disagree with you, but I respect your autonomy.

**2. We can agree to disagree.** I can respect your autonomy to make the decision, but I don't have to agree with your rationale or behaviors.

**3. You can't, nor should, own someone else's "stuff."** It's your decision, so own it. I can't and won't feel badly about myself, given your choice of decisions for you. Your choice, your ramifications.

**4. Set healthy boundaries.** I get to define what is acceptable to me to set healthy boundaries. For example, if you choose to do nothing, you don't get to rant to me about how you feel about having done nothing.

**5. Let go.** The most difficult thing that is asked of us, and perhaps the most important factor in our well-being, is letting go. Breathe. You've done what you can do and acted with good intent, love, and compassion. All you've done is attempt to be the best version of yourself that you can be ... with the hope of the best outcome for all.

It's never easy. I will admit that this is a work in progress for many, myself included. Timing is everything. Sometimes, it's not the best time for the horse to drink. Sometimes, there is a period of reflection required before drinking. When you're ready, I am ready. Just let me know.

And sometimes, we need to acknowledge that our internal angst in leading that horse to water is, in fact, our own angst - and with that comes a choice to let it go, yet another opportunity to learn about ourselves in our daily journey called life.

## Leading The Horse: Part II | Allan Besselink

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