



FLOWERDALE ESTATE ALPACAS

Your Alpaca Baby: The Two Personality Types and How to Raise 'em Up

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Her writings have influenced thousands of camelid owners.

In the last column I wrote about herd management issues from my point of view as both a trainer of animals and a teacher of people. I offered some ideas and my thoughts about breeding, keeping stud males, and birthing. I left you with some cautionary advice about babies and promised to pick up from there in this article. Through out this column I refer to babies as he, this is less awkward than using combinations of he and she. This is only a writing convenience; the advice in this article applies equally to both male and female babies.

It has been said that there are three kinds of people in the world....

- "Those who make things happen,
- Those who watch what happens,
- And those who wonder what happened."

At the risk of oversimplification there are only two kinds of alpaca babies. Type A babies that for one reason or another can't get enough of human beings and the rest of them—type B.

A type A baby may pop right out of the uterus as a fearless little imp or he can be created by circumstances such as medical intervention, bottle-feeding or very early over-handling of an inappropriate nature. Regardless of how a type A baby originates he must learn respect for human beings, boundaries, and to view human beings as leaders not playthings, peers, or mommies.

The second type of baby type B, is shy but curious, interested in humans but not overly so. A type B baby must learn to have confidence. These babies need to know that human beings are safe to be around and that we two leggeds can be trusted to behave responsibly. Type B babies are by far in the majority. I would guess that for every type A baby there are fifty or more type B babies.

Ironically, with only a few differences the same handling techniques are appropriate for both types of babies. Treat baby alpacas respectfully and EXPECT the same in return and it is easy to raise a baby of either type that is both confident and well mannered.

This baby is most definately not standing in balance!

Type A Babies

We use physics to describe the way the world works.

What goes up must come down.

For every action there must be an equal and opposite reaction.

I invented the word Camelidynamics to describe the way that the world works when it comes to alpacas and llamas.

Law of Camelidynamics:

Behaviors you encourage in a young alpaca will persist and become more pronounced as he grows up.





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Type A babies are intensely interested in humans. They follow humans around, sniff, nibble and pull on clothing or rub their necks and heads on a human. They almost always display a preoccupation with feet sniffing and nibbling shoes. They will often run over to humans with the tail over the back with the neck low -the submissive crouch. Often these behaviors are misinterpreted as love and affection. Far from it, these behaviors are the very beginnings of what will often become controlling, disrespectful and possibly aggressive behavior.

As a type A baby matures his conduct is made more problematic because of his increasing size. The behaviors also are likely to intensify. Encourage a baby alpaca to race up to you from across the pasture, follow you around for food treats, or wrestle playfully with you and there is no reason to expect that these behaviors will magically disappear as your "friendly" young alpaca reaches 150 pounds. Running up can become charging, nibbling can become biting, and rubbing can become chest butting. What used to be a gentle nuzzling for food treats becomes something more like a police search. What used to be adorable becomes annoying if not dangerous.

Type A babies are in to everything. Any new item in their surroundings must be examined. They have an intense desire to control their environment. Type A's that are born that way often grow up to be the female herd leaders or dominant males. While it is fine for type A's to be the leaders of the herd it is important for them to view humans as something else altogether. Humans lead the dance; we are in charge of the barn and make the decisions. I don't believe that we must behave in a dominant fashion in order to be respected, but we must be very clear about boundaries and discourage disrespectful behavior. Disrespectful conduct is much easier to alter when it first occurs. Ignoring the behavior WILL NOT WORK.

Barn Department around type A babies

Be aware of your personal space. We can touch babies, we can share a mutual nose sniff but babies should not touch us. This simple rule can save you a lot of heartache. A baby that touches you is corrected. A flick with a finger on the nose and a firm "STAY BACK" is usually enough. Babies that don't pay attention to a finger correction can be corrected humanely with a firm bip on the nose with a Frisbee. The correction outlines the edge of the your personal space and is a not a punishment. Think of the contact as defining your force field. The nose meets the Frisbee at the edge of your personal space with enough oomph to startle the baby but not to enough to hurt him. On the other hand it is important to make your point. Use the Frisbee too tentatively and it will only become a game.

It is a good idea to wait as long as possible to wean a naturally occurring type A baby. A Type A baby often becomes impertinent with other members of the herd as he gets older. Herd females will jump right in this youngsters business and put him in his proper place. Wean him to a peer group too soon and a type A will never get the benefit of learning from his elders.

When you must bottle raise a young alpaca leave him in the barn with the herd. Minimize time spent feeding him and any other unstructured time –that is time not in the catch pen. As much as you would like to, do not snuggle or fondle the baby while feeding him. Wait until a more appropriate less confusing time to touch him. It is highly advisable to distance the human from the bottle in some way. Stretch a blanket along a fence, stick your arm through a hole in the blanket and stay on the other side of the fence from the baby. This prevents the baby from learning undesirable behaviors such as nibbling on your clothes and keeps your behavior in check too.



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Handling/Training type A babies

Some people advise leaving all babies, particularly the "pushy" ones, alone until they are weaned. I think just the opposite is a safer course of action. It is important to get type A's in a catch pen ASAP and demonstrate your leadership (more later on what exactly to do in the catch pen). Don't be surprised when type A's go crazy when you confine them. Type A's want to control things and they are afraid when they can't leave the scene whenever they want to. Getting your type A comfortable with confinement is a key to his training.

Barn Department around Type B Babies

When an alpaca baby is born there is no reason he should be any more frightened of you than another herd member or a fence post. In fact most people notice that young alpaca babies will allow a human to approach and touch them with little fear. What happens in those first days of life to make baby alpacas change their minds about humans?



The handler is overwhelming this baby, handled this way the baby can't think and will only learn to fight handling.

Law of Camelidynamics

Do things that your alpacas find frightening and they will become frightened of you! Corollary: When alpacas are frightened of something they avoid it.

The neighbor comes over and wants to see the new baby. At few days of age it is easy to chase him down or sneak up and grab him real quick to show him off. Every time we weigh the baby we pick him up and carry him over to the scale. When it is time for initial shots...what the heck, the baby is so little lets just pick him up and hold him still to give those shots. Chasing a baby, sneaking up on him, grabbing him, picking him up or holding him against his will could have something to do with his change of heart! Perhaps his mother doesn't like or trust humans for some of the same reasons. Mom is the LAW! If every time the baby wanders over to visit with us his mother stomps her foot as if to say, "I told you don't go near those things they are dangerous!" it is going to have an effect on how your young alpaca feels about humans.



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Minimize your HUMAN behaviors that are bound to scare alpacas whether they are adults or babies. Handle your animals in a way that demonstrates to them that you are both safe to be around and trustworthy. When a baby is born there are management tasks that must be done to insure the health of the baby and the mother. I also believe that with a bit of barn organization and a commitment we can eliminate the need to chase, grab, pick up or hold alpaca babies.

Appropriately placed aisle ways, catch pens a scale with a ramp and box around it are all ways to avoid picking a baby up off the ground. When you need to deal with the baby he should be with or very near his mother. If necessary bring a group of animals into the barn or catch pen to avoid chasing a mother and her new baby. Bring the baby and his mom into a catch pen to show him off to the neighbors. Learn to give shots while the baby is standing on his own four feet. Always work in a catch pen so that you can work to bring your animal into balance rather than restraining him. The time you take to teach your babies to have confidence in you will come back to you over and over as your baby grows up.

Working in a Catch Pen with a baby of either type

Your goal is to teach a baby to override his flight response and accept your touch all over his body. Work with a baby in a catch pen (~10 feet by 10 feet) with his mother present. Older babies can be worked in a peer group.

If mom is present it is a good idea to work a bit with her first. She will have a better sense of what you intend to do with her baby and will be more relaxed.

Approach the baby from behind his eye and drop a soft rope over the top of the head so the baby is inside a loop of rope. I can now use the rope to maintain contact with the baby when I choose to lose contact with my hands. I use my hands on the midline of the neck or use the rope to balance the baby. If the baby wants to move, that is perfectly fine. I move with him.



The handler has dropped a catch rope over the babies head and is getting him accustomed to the rope and signals from the handler.

The most important beginning lesson is to teach a baby is to over ride his instinctive desire to run from me. I want the baby to stand his ground. To help teach him do this I use the rope to bring him into balance. A baby that is standing in balance is standing with his head and neck naturally in line with the body. The body is carried over the feet; the feet are all carrying weight evenly. Anticipate when and in which direction the baby intends to move and preempt his movement by shifting the balance back to



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neutral over the feet. Remember to look at the baby's feet and keep a light contact with the rope or your hands. If the baby is leaning to the outside with his weight on the feet away from you, readying to take a step away, use his neck or the rope around his neck to bring him back to center with weight equally on all four feet. If your type A baby tries to lean on you or push against you put him in neutral over his feet by using your hand on the midline of the neck to shift the weight away from you. If you are having trouble make your pen smaller by stacking bales of hay inside the pen.



The handler is helping this baby llama learn to override his instinctive urge to flee by helping him stand in balance.

What I have just described is a very different procedure than using your superior strength to HOLD a baby still. The former teaches the baby he can stand on his own and be touched; the latter teaches the baby you are strong enough to hold him still. Balancing your baby teaches self-control; holding him still teaches submission and or escape and evasion. Babies are much smaller and lighter than adults are. It requires personal vigilance to balance rather than hold. You must use your hands very lightly and check the feet often.

Once the baby is standing in balance I use the Clouded Leopard TTouch or the Abalone TTouch* to encourage the baby to focus on our interaction. I work with the head initially. Work the mouth, bridge of the nose and ears. Work only as long as you are able to keep your babies attention. Better to stop too soon than to work too long. I want to direct the interaction, and I want our time together to be pleasant so that I do not create resistance to future lessons. I think it important to make the time for frequent short lessons in the first few weeks of your baby's life. On the other hand if your baby is already several months old these lessons make a good beginning when ever you decide to start. Five minutes every other day is ideal for very young babies, ten to fifteen minutes two to three times a week is good for older babies. A lesson plan might be:

- Lesson 1: getting the baby to stand still for a second or two next to you.
- Lesson 2: touching the head and neck
- Lesson 3: handling the legs and the tail. I am not so much interested in teaching a baby to pick up his feet as I am in teaching him to keep the feet on the ground as I handle them.

Other lessons can involve touching the head for longer periods of time leading to initial haltering or touching the legs and picking up the feet leading to toenail trimming as the baby approaches 4-5 months of age.



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After the first few weeks lessons can taper off to once or twice a week. You have set the tone for the relationship. Try a body wrap* on a baby. It works wonders. Babies are very tied to their instincts and a body wrap really helps a baby to stay focused. I usually tie the two ends of the body wrap together with a knot and place it right over the head, twist it twice and pop it around the rear quarters. If you have a peer group bring them all into the catch pen together and work with each one in turn.

Final tips for A's

I don't recommend participating in a dominance contest with alpacas particularly type A's. You have an opposable thumb! You are in charge; you don't have to prove it. Don't give away your place of preeminence by encouraging young alpacas to behave disrespectfully towards you. Be aware of your personal space, set consistent limits, be respectful of your alpacas and be careful about asking too much too soon. Use training and handling methods like the ones I've presented that do not rely on force or intimidation.

Final tips for B's

Don't ever sneak up and grab a baby alpaca. Grabbing and chasing teaches your alpacas to be wary and afraid. Resist the urge to reach out and touch your alpacas as you move amongst them. You will not teach your alpacas to be less afraid of you by continuing to do what scares them.

For more information about training babies, the TTouch, the bodywrap and other elements of Camelidynamics read Marty's new book *The Camelid Companion*.



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