

## GUEST SPEAKER

# “Everyone Is Teachable”

*Animal Trainer Diane Branagan*



At the beginning of my career, 29 years ago, I worked for a company that trained horses, camels, lions, tigers, dogs and cats. That was my introduction to handling animals on film and TV sets. I've been exposed to everything — primates, big cats. My first film experience was on *Titanic*, where I trained the dogs and rats. I still do dogs and sometimes wolves, but I have narrowed it down. Now, I primarily do horses.

You have to remember — that's an animal. It has a different brain. It can't talk to you, though it can definitely communicate. I use the 1 percent rule: If you can just make it better by 1 percent each day, at the end of 100 days, you're significantly better. If they just learn a little bit each day, after three months of preparation, we'll have something to present to the camera.

That's how I learn as well. Little increments. Coming to work every day. Learning and pushing myself. And that's what I do with the actors. There are some who have never been around horses before, and you can tell that they are fearful. If a person is afraid of an animal, it reads on film. So, before filming a season of *Yellowstone*, for example, we do a cowboy camp, where we get the actors out working with their horses. I would rather work with someone who knows nothing about horses than someone who went on trail rides in the fifth grade. It's hard to unlearn bad habits, whereas if they come in with a clean canvas, I can teach them a lot.

Any horse trainer will tell you that you have to look where you're going, not where you've been. When horses are pulling a buggy or wagon, the driver really has to look ahead on the road, so they can send the horses to that point. If the driver is looking directly down at the horses, there is no guidance for them. That's like driving a car while looking at the steering wheel.

But people eventually get it. Everyone is teachable. As I tell the actors I work with, “What you find difficult today will be your warm-up tomorrow.”