

Dave Rossiter's

Horse Sensible

HORSEMANSHIP



1

Foundations



FOUNDATIONS

THE HORSE SENSIBLE
HORSEMANSHIP PROGRAM

DAVE ROSSITER

The Horse Sensible Horsemanship Program

Foundations

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Introduction

The other day while having lunch with a friend, we were discussing the amazing changes we have seen in our lifetime. Since we are both in our late fifties, it was comical to think back when we were kids watching an old black and white TV, with a choice of four or five channels.

We had one phone in the house that was on a party line with other neighbors, so you had to wait your turn to use the phone. And how I survived my early years without a computer, cell phone, and the many other wonders of today's technology is beyond me. But somehow I did survive, and now I live a life that is immersed in all of this technology and modernization that experts say makes us more productive, safer, and happier. I guess the jury is out as to whether we are any happier today than back in the sixties, but now that I have dated myself, I am sure you're not really interested in hearing about how different things are today compared to my early years growing up.

But wait a minute, there is one thing that is different today vs. forty years ago that should be of interest to all of us who interact with horses. I'm talking about the sweeping changes we have seen in the methods many horsemen and horsewomen practice to enhance their

relationship and success with horses.

Probably the most popular term describing this approach is "Natural Horsemanship." As many of you know, the early pioneers of Natural Horsemanship as we know it today were guys like brothers Tom and Bill Dorrance, along with Ray Hunt.

They took a whole new approach to training horses that replaced force and abuse with non-aggressive, non-predatory methods that focused on communication, understanding, and psychology. Their methods gave rise to today's multi-million dollar industry of "Natural Horsemanship" that is practiced by its many disciples in some form or fashion, including the many trainers and clinicians that are now household names to many of us.

So even though today's technology and modernization may not make us happier, I can guarantee you that there are a lot of us horse enthusiasts, and horses as well, that are much happier due to the positive changes we have seen in how we interact with our horses, via "Natural Horsemanship."

The term Natural Horsemanship is really a broad term, and there are a lot of different methods and philosophies used by the many trainers and clinicians calling themselves

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Natural Horsemen or Horsewomen. The common thread among all of these programs is usually a non-predatory approach focusing on the psychology of the horse.

It's important to recognize that Dorrance and Hunt revolutionized how the masses approach their relationship with horses, and did so by formalizing their techniques. Their philosophies and methods initially made their way to the general public when Ray Hunt started sharing his knowledge via his clinics that he started way back in the early seventies.

As I look back on my early career with horses, I feel very fortunate that I was able to come in contact with some true horsemen and horsewomen that learned from the horse, and practiced many of the methods that are the foundation of my training program. Likewise, I can also reflect on the experiences that were not so positive, and I was able to learn from those as well.

I've also been extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to either learn first hand, or study the methods of many of the

great "Natural Horsemanship" practitioners including the Dorrances and Ray Hunt. So really, my journey that has led me to where I am today is a culmination of experiences gained from the thousands of horses I have come in contact with, along with the human encounters that include everyone from the old timers to modern day trainers, and the many other folks that I have encountered along the way.

Before we proceed to the next level and beyond in our program, I think you will find it interesting to hear some of my real life stories describing important experiences where I gained valuable knowledge over the years. The knowledge I gained from these experiences not only contributed to my success with horses, but also serves as the foundation for my "Horse Sensible" program. So as the old saying goes, "gather round the transistor my friends, and let me tell you about my journey that has led me to where I am today. Looking back, it's been a great ride so far and I look forward to continuing my journey through life with family, friends, and horses a priority.



Hank and the Trophy Blanket

Good old Hank was a trainer at the now defunct Centennial Race Track in Denver where I started as a groom and ended up galloping horses for his stable.

Especially with the old timers, I will give you some color so you have a true flavor of these true horse people characters.

Hank was not mainstream compared to most of the trainers. Usually the hired help slept in the barn tack rooms and the trainer lived off the track, in a hotel. Not the case with Hank. He slept in the tack room so he could be with his horses twenty-four hours a day.

In the pre-dawn hours while most of the trainers were in the coffee shop discussing plans for the morning workouts, Hank had already fed the horses, cleaned stalls, and would head to the community shower to get cleaned up before the sun came up.

One morning while taking his shower, an unidentified individual or individuals raided the shower room taking everything but Hank's hat and boots.

Hank was in his seventies, smoked all his life, and was about as wide as he was tall—in short, not a picture of health. He always said he was giving serious consideration to donating his body to science.

Without hesitation he walked out of the shower building en route to the coffee shop wearing just his hat and boots. Every last person in the coffee shop (probably fifty to sixty people) looked up in awe when Hank broke through the door announcing that he would be waiting at the track entrance for the return of his clothes. He proceeded to the track entrance and leaned against the rail still sporting just his boots and hat, and just waited. Every horse entering the track had to go by Hank standing next to the gate with his furry back side—and I mean furry from the top of his shoulders all the way down to his ankles.

After about a half an hour there was no sign of his clothes. It turned into a dangerous situation with horses shying at the sight of Hank as they entered the track. In desperation, several

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of the trainers retrieved a horse blanket draped on a nearby fence. They failed to notice that the blanket was a trophy blanket belonging to one of the top trainers.

The blanket was an award his horse had won for winning the biggest futurity race run at Centennial. They proceeded to tackle Hank, wrap him in the blanket, load him in a golf cart, and deliver him back to his tack room.

Well the story didn't stop there.

The trainer who owned and treasured the trophy blanket demanded its return, but Hank held the blanket hostage. He delivered a ransom note the next morning to the coffee shop (fully clothed). His demand was for a new pair of \$1,000 alligator boots, a \$500 Stetson, a new pair of Wranglers (waist size 48), and a new Pendleton shirt. All the trainers chipped in, the goods were purchased, Hank was paid his ransom, and the blanket was returned unwashed.

Hank was a real character. He was a rogue who lived and died horses. Although different, Hank was a successful trainer, and thought of by many of his fellow trainers as not only a great leg man, but a guy who had a real way with horses.

As a trainer of high-strung thoroughbred race horses, he preached what he called connection. He described connection as having the horse's full attention, as well as the horse having your full attention.

The way you achieve connection, he would preach, was through relaxation, and always moving in a rhythmic fashion around horses. Hank would encourage riding each stride, and

breathing in rhythm with the horse. You know, I look back, and his horses were always much more relaxed and willing whether it was in the saddling paddock or galloping on the track.

Hank was the only trainer I worked for at the track that rarely used nose or lip chains, and always had the calmest horses in the starting gate. The other thing was, his horses were always tuned in. He would emphasize that if you and your horse are fully connected, you will think and move as one at all times—from the minute you enter his stall until he is cooled down and put back in his stall. In doing so, you have the horse's full attention, whether it's in a scary situation, or you are trying to hold or change to a certain pace on the track.

Every employee of Hank's had to learn and practice connection at all times when handling his horses. It really worked.

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THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Connection • Rhythm • Relaxation



Jim and the Chicken Clad Beauties

Jim Warner, what a guy. He had been married and divorced five or six times, so not much luck with the ladies, but in retrospect, he was a true horseman.

Jim's niche was starting colts and training cutting horses. Under his direction I would help him start colts during the day, and ride turn back horses for him in the evenings. My only compensation was the knowledge I gained under his direction—which, by the way, was invaluable—and a free dinner every night at the Drumstick Restaurant.

Every evening at 5 p.m. we would head over to the Drumstick where they had their nightly dinner specials. It became apparent early on that Jim was not drawn to the Drumstick because of their fried chicken specials featuring a huge slice of Texas toast. No, the big draw for Jim was the fleet of waitresses that dressed up in chicken-themed uniforms. Most all of them had deep

voices from years of smoking and every last one of those chicken beauties treated Jim like one of the family. He was royalty at this place, with his own personal corner booth. Above the booth hung a picture of Jim with all of the Chickees giving him a kiss on the cheek at one of their Christmas parties. Come to find out, Jim had no kids and no other family other than his horses and his chicken-clad girls at the restaurant.

Jim was the ultimate in emotional neutral training. He never lost his temper, and emphasized that horses think in the here and now. He took a quiet approach with horses, and really did practice a method of making the right thing easy, and the wrong thing not so easy—Positive Reinforcement.

Jim's favorite saying that he never stopped repeating was: "Not today, not tomorrow, not ever should you ever cross the line by using

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negative reinforcement on a horse. When you do so, you lose the trust of your horse, and undo a lot of what you have taught him up to that point.”

He would also say you can’t cheap shot a horse. You have to be predictable and never set up your horse to fail by asking him to do anything that is more than one step beyond what he already knows. I can also still remember him

saying that it’s fine to work a horse in circles to develop balance, straightness, rate, and work on a light rein between your reins and legs, but give him a job. Take him outside, open gates, push cattle, and make him think. His saying was, “You train them inside, and outside.”

You know what? How true that was then, and how true that still is.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Emotional Neutral Training

Thinking in the Here and Now

Making the Right Thing Easy, and the Wrong Thing Not So Easy

Not Today, Not Tomorrow, Not Ever

Never a Cheap Shot

Predictable

Never One Step More Than He Already Knows

Give Him a Job

Train Them Inside and Outside



The Colonel and the Message

Back when I was on the high school rodeo team we used to make several trips a year from Denver to a wild horse ranch located in central Wyoming. At the time it was one of the few ranches left in this country that still had wild horses running free. The herd was several thousand in number, and something you would see in a John Wayne movie. Anyway, we would spend several days with the ranch cowboys rounding up part of the herd and running them into the home sorting corrals. They would sort out sick and crippled horses, and we would cut out young horses that we would purchase and take home to use as bucking horses.

The old guy that owned the ranch went by the name of “The Colonel.” He was a big heavy-set fellow who walked with a cane, had big white suspenders, and always had an unlit cigar in his mouth to chew on. The guy was a true horse psychologist, or nagologist as he put it—he thought of himself as a nagologist since he referred to horses as nags—and an expert in

describing herd dynamics.

Too robust to get up on a horse, he drove all over the ranch in his Ford pickup. The pickup bed was filled with chewed up cigar butts and empty Falstaff beer cans (seamless beer cans had not yet been invented).

The Colonel was not a picture of health, but spending his whole life around horses, he really knew his stuff. We spent hours in the front seat of his pickup just watching his wild horse herd as they grazed and moved. Since the ranch was so remote there was nothing else to do, there wasn’t even any television reception.

The Colonel would pick out a nag, as he termed him, and describe his eyes, ear set, head and nose shape, and color. From that, he would process the information and say: “Son, that pig-eyed, long-eared, steep-muzzled, roan horse will be a handful, not a nagality that you prefer in a good saddle horse unless you have a lot of time and patience. He’s smart, but stubborn.”

Or he would point out a nice sorrel horse

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with a lot of sclera in the eyeball and say: “That horse has too much white in the eye. He grew up not seeing as well as the other horses, and getting pushed around all the time. He will always be scared of his own shadow. Don’t try to make a parade horse out of him or you will waste a lot of time and probably end up in a wreck.”

Then he would point out the alpha mare in the group and describe how every other horse in the herd watched and took the lead from that mare. If the alpha mare showed signs of caution or fear, the rest of the herd showed fear. If the alpha mare was calm, the rest of the herd was calm.

She communicated mostly via body language as did all the rest of the horses in the group. The most subtle of body movements always got a response from the horse further down in the pecking order.

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The Colonel would point out certain horses and describe how they were communicating via certain body parts like ear, feet, and body position. It’s like he would read each horse by subtle body movements and mannerisms. From that point forward I looked at horses a

little differently, focusing on how their characteristics might influence personality or as the Colonel would say, nagality. And it was really the first time that I saw first hand how large herds of horses communicate and interact in the wild.

Looking back, the Colonel was a wealth of information and had obviously come in contact

with a lot of horses in his lifetime. I really appreciate the fact that I had the opportunity to spend so much time with this guy whose experience and knowledge never hit the big time, but influenced my life nevertheless.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Herd Dynamics

Alpha Mares

Communication Via Body Language

Nagality



Pres and Lorretta

In my early teens I worked for Preston and his wife Lorretta. Back in those days you could make a good living going to the country auctions to buy horses, and then take them to town to sell to city folks. Well that was Pres's forte. He would travel to sale barns all over Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming reselling horses that were not suitable for city buyers, and purchasing a new batch to run through our program for resale to either another sale barn or city buyers.

Pres took me under his wing teaching me the tricks of the trade. Unlike many of the traders in this business, I found Pres to be a very honest guy who really did care about the well being of horses.

The fact of the matter is a lot of horses did, and still do end up at a sale barn because of some issue. Back in those days, however, you

had a lot of good horses come through that were ranch raised without a lot of problems. Likewise today, there are a lot of reputable outfits where good horses are sold at production sales.

Anyway, my years spent with Pres were invaluable from the standpoint of what I learned from Pres and, more importantly, what the hundreds of horses I came in contact with taught me.

Pres had an eye for good horses. Much like the Colonel, he could look at a horse and pretty much tell you what you could expect from that horse based on his eyes, head, and confirmation. Under his tutoring I would ride a lot of horses coming from the sale, figuring out their issues, and correcting them if the horse and situation were advantageous to putting the time and effort into that particular horse. If not, they were rerouted to another sale barn. I also

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became pretty adept at showing horses in the sale ring.

You're probably wondering why I haven't mentioned any specifics on what I learned from Pres. The reason is, Pres was in the horse trading business that treated horses as a commodity. Even though he was not abusive, many of the folks in that business would do whatever it would take to make money on a horse—whether it was drugging them so they would show well in the sale ring, or using negative reinforcement and abuse to correct a behavioral problem as quickly as possible.

This was really an eye opener for me.

I learned first hand that most, if not all, behavioral problems with horses are human error. The horse is the most honest creature on earth (without motive) whose actions are

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instinctual, they do not know the difference between right and wrong, and are a clean slate until a human shapes their behavior, in a good or bad way. And, unfortunately, until the "Natural Horsemanship" movement took

hold, the masses interacted with horses primarily through force and negative reinforcement.

This was the point in my career that I began to shift from what was mainstream at the time, and became an advocate of the horse. I started feeling sorry for almost every horse I came in contact with since they

were misunderstood by almost every human they came in contact with during their lifetime. Their behavioral shortfalls and distrust of humans were strictly a result of human error. My shift to a horse advocate was reinforced many years later when I began following the teachings and practices of Ray Hunt.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

His Horses

Human Error

Horses are the Most Honest Creature on Earth (Without Motive)

Clean Slate



Heidi the German Mentor

During my high school years I would spend part of the year halter starting yearlings and starting two- and three-year-olds under saddle for the Peppy Blue Dot Ranch in Parker, Colorado.

The Ranch was owned by Flo Ragsdale who was a full blooded Crow Indian. She and her husband Tom built the ranch, which was a real showplace, with a good reputation for producing nice pleasure horses.

Flo ran about fifty brood mares and would sell most of the offspring as green broke two- and three-year-olds. Anyway, Tom died, leaving

her to run the ranch. She probably knew quite a bit about horses, but I never could quite catch her in a sound state of mind so she could share her knowledge with me. She would sit in her Lazy Boy in front of a picture window that overlooked the round pen and arena below.

With a set of binoculars she would watch me working horses all day, as well as keep track of the hired help cleaning the stalls and pens. Unfortunately, she had a real taste for firewater. She was normally drunk by noon, passed out by 5 p.m. and awake by 9 a.m., coming out of a haze only in time to start all over again. Actually,

she was pretty easy to work for since the only time she left her Lazy Boy was to mix another drink, visit the ladies room, or stagger off to bed. Anyway I appreciated the opportunity she gave me training her horses.

Now that I was taking more of a horse advocate approach, and pretty confident in my horse training skills, I was feeling pretty good as the head trainer at the Peppy Blue Dot—even though I was the one and only trainer.

I had my training routine down after spending the previous season at the ranch with what I thought was good success. Flo was still keeping Jack Daniel's and Tylenol in business, and we had a nice set of two- and three-year-olds to start under saddle.

On a rare occasion, Flo summoned me one morning via walkie talkie. Nursing a hangover, she said that an old friend of Tom's had a son that called looking for a horse. His name was Doug, and he and his wife Marilyn were coming out that afternoon looking to buy a horse. Flo said she didn't need to meet them so just take care of it. She also said that a second cousin of Tom's named Heidi would be arriving sometime that week with her travel trailer. Flo said Heidi would be spending the summer, and I was to show her where to park the trailer and, by the way, she didn't need to meet her either.

"Okay, Flo, over and out."

Doug and Marilyn showed up that afternoon

and picked out a nice blue roan filly. They were pretty savvy horse folks that were into showing western pleasure horses as a hobby at local shows in Chandler, Arizona. Doug was an ASU professor, and a part-time artist. Marilyn was a grade school teacher. We agreed on a price that included me riding this filly for sixty days, and having a good start on her before they headed home to Arizona at the end of the summer. I got their phone number and agreed to call them every week or so to give them a progress report.

A couple of days later, Heidi showed up with her travel trailer in tow. As soon as she stepped out of her pickup wearing her English riding apparel (riding breeches and black knee-high boots) I took notice with some real caution and concern. Likewise, she sized me up from head to toe taking notice of my cowboy hat, trophy belt buckle (which she later referenced as a man

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hole cover), worn out chaps and boots. These days there's a lot of English/western crossover, but back then, us cowboy types thought English folks were wimpy flakes, and English folks thought that cowboys were just a wild bunch that had no sophistication and a sheer lack of horsemanship abilities. Unless Heidi was a drunk intending to hole up with Flo for the summer, the prospects didn't look good.

Heidi parked her trailer and pretty much kept to herself that first month. She was around seventy years of age, grew up in Germany and had only come to the U.S. the prior year

to retire with her husband in Florida. Her husband passed away that previous Christmas, so she decided to make a trip to Colorado to see the horse ranch that Tom had written to her about. As I later found out, Heidi was schooled in dressage growing up, and made a career in Germany showing and training dressage horses. Although she was sometimes hard to understand, she spoke fluent English.

That first month went pretty well from a horse training perspective. In fact, Doug and Marilyn's filly was one of the best of the bunch as far as being relaxed and making the most progress in thirty days. As far as Heidi was concerned, we would say hi in passing, but she made it a point to avoid me if at all possible. I tried to act like I didn't notice, but it was obvious that she was observing every move I made training horses. At least at this point it didn't appear like she was going to play expert and approach me to discuss everything I was doing wrong.

A couple more weeks went by and the filly was doing so well I called Doug and Marilyn and told them she was ready to go. They came out on a Saturday to watch me put her through her paces. As usual, she was totally relaxed as I saddled her up. I stepped on her in the round pen and put her through the same routine we had been doing the past several weeks. We moved to the arena and I loped her in circles on a loose rein, stopped her and backed her up.

I was feeling pretty proud of both of us by this point so I thought we would just show off a bit.

I had not yet worked on using the fence to roll her over her hocks, but thought I would just run her down the fence, put on the brakes and rollback. The next thing I remember, I was airborne with no horse under me. Coming out of the rollback, she fell apart and bucked me off before I knew what happened. As I was getting up off the ground, I noticed Doug and Marilyn

watching in awe. Then I noticed Heidi peeking out of the barn with a big grin on her face. To add salt to my wounds, Flo rang me up on the walkie talkie and said, "We are here to train and sell pleasure horses, not bucking horses—over and out."

Well that was a big blow to my ego and confidence as a world-class horse trainer.

In the end, it all turned out fine with the filly and Doug and Marilyn. They loaded her up a couple weeks later and, during our good byes, Doug handed me a pencil drawing of me in flight over the pitching filly. We stayed in touch, and I ultimately saw them years later when I moved to Arizona. The filly worked out great for them.

A few days after the buck-off incident, I finally sucked it up that evening and knocked on Heidi's trailer door. We sat at her makeshift dining table and she poured us some ice tea. What ensued was a discussion that had a real

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positive impact on how I changed my thinking about training horses. I started the conversation by saying I didn't know what got into that filly. Until that episode, she never even offered to buck.

"You cowboys just don't get it do you Dave?" She proceeded by saying that when she was learning to speak English from an American family in Germany, when she did not understand what they were saying, they would just start talking louder to her. "It wasn't that I couldn't hear, I just did not understand the language," she said. "And that's what you did to that filly. You got loud with your aids and pressures, and she had no idea what you were talking about. You put pressure on that filly to create a particular shape before she understood all the baby steps she needed to get to that point of understanding."

Boy that was a lot to absorb, but I thought to myself, how did she know that I had not tried doing a rollback on the fence with that filly.

Well the rest of the summer Heidi spent most of the day watching me work horses, and giving me advice. The foundation of her training philosophies was that training horses involved using pressures to shape a horse's behavior. Horses learn when a pressure is not perceived as an attack, the pressure is only one step away

from something the horse already understands, and if doing the correct thing relieves the pressure, that is the reward to the horse.

Always Remember That Pressures (Aids) are and is the Language That Makes Sense to the Horse.

The one step away thing kind of went along with what Jim Warner meant when he kept repeating baby steps, baby steps. By the end of the summer, I had again added to my arsenal of training knowledge from that which I learned from Heidi. I came to really respect her, and when she left in the fall I looked forward to her returning in the spring.

The next and last summer at the Peppy Blue Dot was my most successful ever, both from what I learned from Heidi, and the success I had training that year's fillies and colts. Heidi was my mentor, and I became a novice dressage rider with a whole new appreciation for the English way of training. Oh, and by the way, the hours Heidi spent with me on a longe line with me aboard bareback, outreached arms and blindfolded helped me develop an independent seat.

Ole Heidi turned out to be quite a gal, and a real friend in the end. I still have the pencil drawing hanging in my tack room as a reminder of what I learned from that filly and Heidi.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Training Horses Involves Using Pressures to Shape a Horse's Behavior

Horses Learn When a Pressure is Not Perceived as an Attack, the Pressure is Only One Step Away From Something the Horse Already Understands, and if Doing the Correct Thing Relieves the Pressure, That's the Reward to the Horse

Pressures (Aids) are and is the Language that Makes Sense to the Horse

Independent Seat



Clem the Pickup Man

As I look back over my rodeo career, even though I was a rough stock competitor, I spent a lot of time sitting on the bucking chutes watching the timed events.

The calf ropers had horses that would track a calf and put on the brakes when the rider gave them the cue. Good head and heel horses were automatic, and most of the good barrel racing horses knew that pattern backwards and forwards, but in a lot of cases, they were so arena sour it was more of a chore to get them through the gate than run the barrels. And usually, most of the bull dogging competitors would rent several automatic horses that would get them out of the box quickly, and put them in position to slide on the steer.

I also used to spend time watching these same people in the warm-up pen. Most of them loped their programmed horses in endless circles until they were warmed up for their event. If you have a chance to spend time at horse shows, you will learn a lot more watching the competitors in the warm-up pen rather than watching the actual performances. The true horsemen and horsewomen really stand out if you educate yourself and really observe the little things that count.

Anyway, during my last season of High School Rodeo, I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time observing and talking with Clem the Pickup Man. We met at the first rodeo of the season in Westcliffe, Colorado.

Clem grew up on a reining horse operation in Stephenville, Texas, and was spending the summer working for Walt Alsbaugh, the stock contractor, as one of his pickup men.

When it comes down to it, a good pickup horse has to be a real dead broke mount that you can rope on, drag a 2,000 pound bull, and can keep his balance at full speed when a saddle bronc rider is sliding over onto his back end and the bucking horse is snubbed to the saddle horn. Although these horses are broke, most of them I have observed over the years are cowboyed pretty hard, spend a lot of time with their ears pinned, and their tail wringing because their operator is whacking them in the sides with their spurs, and heavy in their mouth.

Well that's what really got my attention when I first saw Clem at work. He was mounted on a real nice gray gelding that had soft warm eyes, and a well muscled hind end. Clem and this horse were both so relaxed in every movement it almost looked like dancing in motion. He didn't

use a tie down, or ride with spurs. This was and still is pretty unheard of for a pickup man and his horse.

This horse had amazing rate and pretty much maneuvered under the pressure of Clem's leg and seat. And he had a great headset with little or no rein contact. What I really noticed was that he was so willing and actually appeared like he loved what he was doing. Clem let me ride this horse a few times, and it was absolutely unbelievable.

Once I figured out how to communicate with him, it was like driving a Formula 1 race car. (To be honest, I have never driven one, but you get the idea.)

The timing for meeting up with Clem couldn't have come at a more perfect time.

I had been schooled that previous year by Heidi, who emphasized that the language a horse understands is pressures. Aids, as Heidi would term them, are pressures that the horse understands. As the vocabulary of these pressures increases, then we use a sequence of these aids to get the horse to take the shapes we want him to take.

Clem never used the term aid, but he and Heidi were on the same page.

His gray horse would take shapes in a willing and relaxed way because Clem trained the horse in baby steps using pressures that he understood. Once I learned the sequence of aids that Clem used on the gray, we got along great. And what I learned from Clem was this: most, but not all, performance horses, or basically any horse that is used to play the games we humans

invent, are trick horses. They are conditioned to cues that are conditioned responses that don't make sense to the horse like pressures and aids.

As Clem described it, just getting the horse to respond to cues instead of pressures (aids) is like putting an automatic transmission in a sports car. Now anyone can drive it, like the bulldogging horses Clem would say.

A cue is something a trainer can sell with the horse. The owner can ride it and cue it and doesn't have to understand all this stuff about pressures (aids) to get the shapes he wants to play people games like barrel race, rope, bulldog, or whatever.

My gray horse works off of pressures, which is why you had to spend some time getting the feel, and figuring out the sequences of pressures to get the shapes you wanted. But once you're both on the same page, you're dance partners, moving as one and taking any shape you desire.

Who would have ever thought this pickup man at a rodeo would preach the same concepts as Heidi the English rider from Germany? Go figure.

From that point forward my ambition was to train a horse to the level of Clem's gray. I have come close on occasion, and believe me, it's an accomplishment that is well worth the effort.

And you know what else is interesting? Over the past fifteen years I have seen a lot of pro rodeo timed event folks (some who were world champions) get into natural horsemanship, with the intent of improving their horsemanship abilities.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:
Trick Horses • Aids • Cues • Dance Partners



The Expert & 66

After graduating from high school I continued to hone my horse training skills at the old Hiwan Ranch located just west of Denver on the Bear Creek River.

The facility was used to house show Hereford cattle back in the fifties and sixties. They converted it to a horse boarding operation since it was gradually being surrounded by residential development.

I leased a couple of the corrals where I kept horses that I would purchase and train to resell to the city folks who were relocating to the area primarily from the Midwest and back East. At any one time I would mainly have good older geldings that would make great family horses (and by the way, they are not that easy to find, since there really is no such thing as bomb proof horse). I would also have two or three colts on hand that I would start and sell to more experienced buyers as potential gymkhana or event type horses.

Anyway, a young family with twelve-year-

old twin girls showed up one Saturday looking to buy the girls their first horse. Since they had just moved from Chicago they were going to fulfill their lifelong dream of owning their own horse, now that they were living in the West. Since they knew absolutely nothing about horses, I explained to them that the best thing they could do would be to buy an older school horse that basically they could learn on, and as they gained more knowledge they could eventually upgrade at some time in the future. I also suggested that they just start with one horse to see if they both really liked the horse experience.

The mom and dad agreed with me, so I saddled up Rex, who was a fifteen-year-old gelding that was just a Steady Eddie and about as gentle as they get. The girls rode him and got along great. I told them the price and explained that they could just board him here at the ranch since they were moving in just down the street.

Anticipating that they would pull out the checkbook and close the deal, I went to get

my bill of sale book out of the pickup. When I returned, the mom and dad had just finished a somewhat heated discussion. The dad looked at me and said that they really liked the horse, but his wife had promised her cousin Merle that they would not purchase a horse without his blessing. Apparently they were staying with Merle until the construction of their house was complete. The mom explained that Merle was a real cowboy who moved to Denver from a big ranch in Arkansas; that he knew a lot about horses, and that they didn't want to do anything without him.

I responded by saying that I appreciated where they were coming from, and to just have Merle come back and he was welcome to give Rex a test ride.

Well, needless to say, they showed back up that afternoon with cousin Merle. This time they were riding in his red Cadillac with the big tail fins in back. Since it was late in the afternoon, there was a whole contingent of tipsy guys hanging around the community picnic tables.

These boarders who called themselves the "Wild Bunch" had their weekly routine. They would show up mid-morning on a Saturday, saddle up and ride for a few hours, then sit around the fire at the common area drinking and telling stories until they mustered up the courage to head home and face an unhappy wife.

Since there were no phones on the premises (pre cell phone era), on more than one occasion an unhappy wife would show up and drag her husband home. I even bought a couple horses from two guys whose wives gave them the ultimatum of marriage or a single life with a horse at Hiwan Ranch. These two obviously

chose to get rid of the horse to keep their wives. I hate to guess how many chose the horses and Hiwan.

Anyway, the Wild Bunch took notice of Merle getting out of his Cadillac. He was sporting a big straw cowboy hat that had a draw string under his chin, and super slim tight flood length jeans with a western belt that had a big John Deere belt buckle. He had rough out boots on with long pointed toes that looked like they just came out of the box. The mom and dad introduced me to Merle who sized me up like I was some kind of swindler attempting to take his cousin and her family to the cleaners. As I looked at Merle, I thought back to the time I spent rodeoing in Arkansas. For the life of me, I didn't recall seeing any cowboys in Arkansas dressed like Merle.

We walked over to the corral and I pointed out old Rex. Merle walked into the corral to size him up, but that big straw hat spooked Rex and the ten other horses, so all the horses did was keep running around the corral with Merle trying to corner Rex.

Knowing that this had the making for a great story that I could tell someone many years later, I just let Merle have at it. After about ten minutes of entertainment, Merle exited the corral, winded, minus Rex, and commenting that those horses were all hard to catch. He then looked at the family and said had he remembered to bring his lasso, he would have just roped that son of a gun.

I proceeded to walk into the corral, walked right up to Rex, haltered him and led him out of the corral. Merle never touched Rex, he just kind of squatted down and shuffled around looking at his underside. What he was looking

for, I never did figure out. He stood up and asked if I would please give him and the family a few minutes alone. I agreed, and walked Rex over by the benches where the Wild Bunch was seated. Every last one of these guys were thinking the same thing I was. Let's see Merle on a horse.

Merle motioned me back over, so I tied up Rex and walked over. He explained that this horse was just too old, its hair was long, and he didn't have any horse shoes on. I laughed to myself, it was the fall, and since Rex had come from a ranch in Montana he had a head start on the other horses putting on a winter coat. And what's with the shoes? That's what you pay horse shoers for. He went on to say that what these girls needed was a horse that was young like them. That way the horse and the girls could learn together. And since this was their first horse, it would be nice to have a horse with some chrome on him. Rex was just not flashy enough for these young girls.

Now don't think for a minute that I considered selling these girls a colt, but I just couldn't pass this one up. I walked them over to the other corral where I had my colts. Just as I would have expected, Merle picked out a buckskin two-year-old gelding that had a big 66 brand on his left hip. He sure enough fit the bill as having chrome on him, just like most deep colored buckskins. I had bought him from a ranch near North Platte, Nebraska, a couple of months prior, and he had about thirty days under saddle.

"Now that's the kind of horse we are looking for," Merle said.

I haltered 66 and asked Merle if he wanted to try him out. Merle looked at the mom and dad who gave their nod, and he replied, "Fine,

but I prefer to use my own gear."

He proceeded to his car and opened his trunk. The plot thickened when he pulled out a brand new Mexican saddle that was as stiff as a board and obviously had never been used. He then pulled out a bridle with a cheap grazing bit with skinny little three-foot-long split reins. He proceeded to throw the saddle on 66 when I asked him if he was going to use a pad or blanket under the saddle. He looked at me with a glaze in his eyes, so I grabbed a pad and blanket and saddled 66 for him. I then suggested that he use my snaffle bit set up since 66 had not yet advanced to his grazing bit rig.

"Not a problem," was his response in a noticeably cocky manner.

As I was starting to feel guilty about putting 66 through this escapade, Merle walked back to his trunk and pulled out a set of cheap aluminum spurs with big long shanks and weird looking cloverleaf rowels. He proceeded to strap these babies on but ran into trouble getting them buckled since they were also brand new Mexican straps. What also seemed a little odd was that Merle wore these spurs just above his ankle bones with the straps so tight they looked like they cut off his circulation. All part of the Arkansas cowboy way I rationalized. I glanced over at the Wild Bunch, and knew that not even the most irate wife had a chance of moving one of these guys at this point.

Well, we walked out to the middle of the arena and I stepped on 66 and put him through a few maneuvers to loosen him up. He was a nice colt that didn't have any hump to him and was nice and soft in the face, and was just starting to move off of leg and seat pressure. I rode him back to the center of the arena and stepped off.

Merle pulled the draw string tight under his chin, adjusted his John Deere belt buckle and proceeded to step on while I was still holding the reins from the ground.

Unfortunately, his pants were so tight he couldn't get his foot up high enough to step in the stirrup. Not wanting to see an interruption in the flow of action, one of the Wild Bunch guys retrieved a five-gallon plastic bucket and set it next to 66. Not to be bested, Merle commented to mom and dad that this was an unusually tall horse—66 was 15 hands, and Merle was about six-foot, so you do the math. Before I proceed, please picture in your mind that the arena fence was made of chain link and was about seven-feet in height.

Merle stepped up on the bucket, put his foot in the stirrup and went to swing his right leg over. His spur rowel rolled over 66's hip and he jumped about two feet. I had control of him, but the move forced Merle to do a two handed death grip on the saddle horn. I suggested to Merle that he might want to shed the spurs, but he rudely refused. By this time I was thinking that this guy really was a jerk. My thoughts then focused on getting a great show without harming 66.

Well, I led 66 and Merle around for a couple minutes until Merle informed everyone in a loud voice that he didn't come here to ride circus ponies in a circle, "So hand over the reins."

I stopped and handed Merle the reins. I hollered at one of the Wild Bunch to shut the arena gate, then I stepped back to watch the show. At first, 66 stood there wondering what was next. Merle just kind of sat there with loose reins, and after about thirty seconds, 66 just started walking.

Merle started plow reining 66 and they did a couple of circles. Coming out of the last circle, Merle bumped 66 with his outside spur and 66 broke into a trot. All of a sudden, Merle got to bouncing so bad he panicked and grabbed the saddle horn with both hands and reins a dangling. As 66 extended the trot, Merle sank both spurs trying to keep his balance. Then 66 broke into a lope headed straight for the end of the arena. By the time they got to the other end, 66 was at a gallop wondering whether his passenger was going to direct him to the left or right when they reached the fence.

By this time, Merle was in survival mode barely staying aboard with each stride. They finally reached the fence and 66 decided to break left. Merle kept going straight, leading with his right shoulder. Everything but his feet and head cleared the top of the fence. Unfortunately, during the descent, his two spurs got hooked on the top of the chain link along with his hat chin strap. As me, mom and dad, the twin girls, and members of the Wild Bunch ran toward the scene of the accident, all you could see was Merle hanging parallel on the fence. His feet were hanging on one end where his spurs were caught, and his head was hanging on the other end by the hat chin strap setup.

When we were within twenty feet of reaching poor Merle, there was a big loud snap as the hat chin strap broke, freeing Merle's head. Then, by the time we reached him, he was hanging upside down on the other side of the fence.

It took four of the Wild Bunch to lift him up high enough to free the spurs from the top of the chain link fence. They lowered him to the ground and he shook out the cobwebs and stood up. Once he got to his feet you could see

he was pretty scraped up. The top of his hat was still hanging on the top of the fence, while the brim was hanging around his neck like a toilet seat.

Without a word to anyone he went directly over to his Cadillac, jumped in, started it, and went to drive off. Realizing he couldn't work the gas pedal and brakes with his spurs on, he stopped about fifty yards down the road, jumped out, and fell over in the street trying to unhook his spur straps.

I loaded Merle's equipment in my pickup and gave mom and dad and the girls a ride home to Merle's house. I explained to them that horses are a serious business and, as you can see, very dangerous if you put yourself in a bad position.

They ended up buying Rex and got along with him great. They even ended up buying another horse with both of the girls taking riding lessons from one of the gals at the stable. As far as Merle, I'm not sure whatever happened to him since the family never mentioned him after that day he drove off.

This was kind of an extreme situation to get my point across, but just on the heels of spending time with Heidi, it really reinforced what she had emphasized. A young horse like 66 didn't yet have much of a vocabulary of pressures and aids, and obviously mom, dad, the girls, and Merle didn't either.

Putting a rider with a minimal vocabulary of horse sensible knowledge with a young horse that has a minimal vocabulary of pressures and aids is simply a recipe for disaster. Even though most horses, young or old would have run off with Merle, the moral of the story is twofold.

First off, to be successful with horses, you need to educate yourself and be honest with your knowledge and abilities. If you don't, there is a good chance you are going to get hurt and/or lose your confidence, which will seriously impair your success and enjoyment with horses.

Secondly, the sooner we recognize that everything we learn about horsemanship will come from what the horse teaches us, the more successful we will be.

We never stop learning from the horse, but early in our horse career, when we have minimal knowledge, we must rely heavily on a horse that has a good vocabulary that we can learn the basics on, just like a golden oldie like Rex.

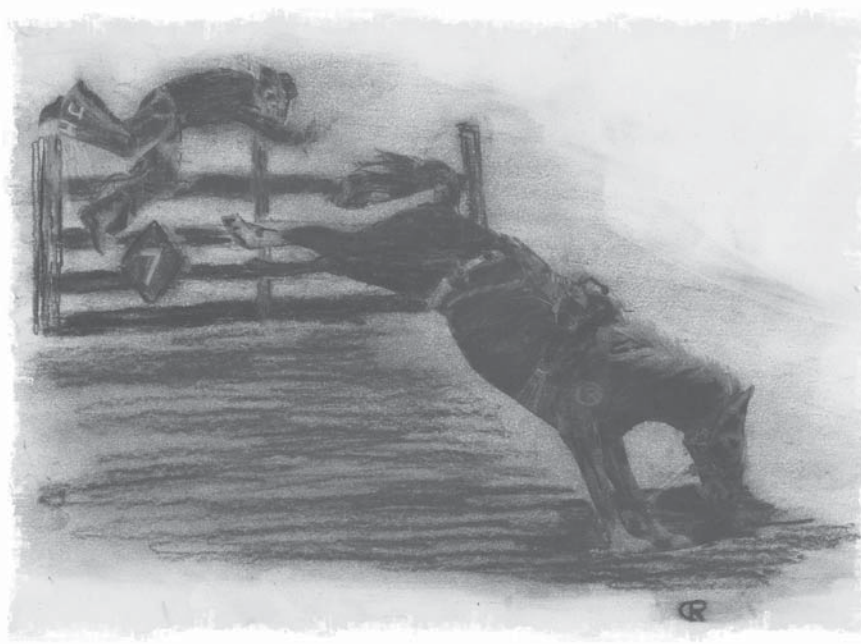
This may seem like common sense, and a pretty basic concept to most of you, but I can't tell you how many people I have run across that make this very mistake. Unfortunately, many people will continue to do so.

Oh, and by the way, another moral of this story is: Buying a horse for looks rather than for what's between his ears is also a very common mistake that many people come to regret later on.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Putting a Rider with a Minimal Vocabulary of Horse Sensible Knowledge with a Horse that has a Minimal Vocabulary of Pressures and Aids is Simply a Recipe for Disaster

Buying a Horse for Looks Rather Than for What's Between His Ears is also a Very Common Mistake Many People Come to Regret Later On



Halbert and The Big Dive

Jim Halbert was probably the craziest individual I ever met. He was married to a Playboy bunny, was a top executive with National Cash Register (back then that was a big deal), and a veteran jump master with, in his words, over 1,000 successful sky dives.

With a type triple A personality, Jim was about as waspy and wired tight as they get. I met Jim one summer afternoon when he showed up at the Hiwan Ranch looking to buy a trail horse. I ended up selling him a real nice sorrel gelding named Raunchy. Raunchy was about as calm and automatic as they get and void of any bad habits. Jim was later elected president of the Wild Bunch and he and Raunchy ended up becoming quite a partnership. More on that later.

As Jim and I got better acquainted, I soon figured out that he was always up for a challenge and never wanted to come in second at anything.

His riding form basically could be described as a monkey wrestling with a football. He wasn't in his element unless a horse was running at full speed while he was flopping around trying to stay aboard.

Anyway, one Saturday afternoon the Wild Bunch, including Jim, had pretty much killed off a bottle of Jack Daniel's and were feeling their oats. They told Jim I was heavy into my rodeo season and he ought to come out to one of our practice sessions to show me up riding a bucking horse.

Knowing that I was afraid of heights, one of the Wild Bunch suggested to Jim that he make a bet with me that if he got on a bareback horse, I would jump out of an airplane. That really got Jim fired up, so he motioned me over to the crowd and proceeded to outline the bet. Being 18 and bulletproof, I wasn't going to back down, so we shook on the bet.

Since Jim took everything so serious, he didn't want to jump into this deal unprepared. He agreed to show up at one of our practices the following month. This would give him plenty of time to purchase the equipment he would need and to get into better shape. Jim joined a gym and proceeded to buy top-of-the-line spurs, bright purple bat wing chaps with his initials sewn in, and a Ralph Shimon bareback rigging. Right up until the big ride it's all the Wild Bunch talked about.

Well, the big night finally arrived, with Jim showing up at the arena with his Wild Bunch entourage. He was all decked out and ready to ride. The first thing out of his mouth was a request for the toughest bronc in the string. I responded by suggesting that since it was his first ride, he might want to consider an easier bronc

until he got the hang of things. "No way," Jim said, "give me the best of the bunch." Not to disappoint Jim, I told the guys to cut out a mare named Scarface and load her in the chute.

Scarface was a mare that we had bought from the Colonel the prior season. She was about as nasty as they get, and her signature move was coming after you pawing and biting once she bucked you off.

Once she was in the chute, we set Jim's rigging while he worked on tying his glove on. Right about now, most guys get kind of nervous in anticipation, especially if it's their first ride. Not Jim, he was as cool as a cucumber, acting

like it was just another day at the office.

He straddled Scarface, put his hand in the rigging, leaned back and raised his hand. He then looked at me and said in a calm voice, "Let's see the big pen boys."

Halbert lasted about three jumps before getting launched straight up in the air. On his decent, Scarface kicked him in the chest before he landed smack dab on his head, knocking him out cold. To add insult to injury, Scarface proceeded to bite him on the butt before the pickup man could run her off.

When we got to Jim, he was out cold and turning blue from swallowing his tongue. One of the guys took out his pocket knife and put it between Halbert's teeth while he freed his tongue. He started breathing again and gradually came to.

By this time it was obvious that Jim was pretty messed up. One of the Wild Bunch drove down the street and called an ambulance from a pay phone. The ambulance arrived, loaded him up, and drove off.

That night one of the Wild Bunch guys called me with the bad news. Jim had broken his sternum, and four ribs. He had a collapsed lung, as well as a severe concussion. And to top it off, his left bun needed ten stitches from the horse bite.

Not a great start for Halbert's rodeo career.

Several months passed without hearing from Halbert, and I left for fall semester at college. I returned home at Thanksgiving to spend the

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holiday with my family.

About 6:30 a.m. on Thanksgiving morning I woke up to someone banging on our door. I jumped up and slipped on some jeans and a sweatshirt and laced up my red high-top tennis shoes. I opened the door and there stood Halbert. He looked at me and said let's go you little SOB. I left a note for my parents letting them know I would return in a few hours.

As I stepped out of the house I looked up to see a big party bus that Halbert rented full of members of the Wild Bunch already drinking beer. We jumped in the bus and Halbert proceeded to explain that today was the annual jump fest celebration at the jump zone south of Denver, and that I would be this year's main attraction.

We arrived at the jump zone with all kinds of fellow jumpers running over to greet the bus. Several planes were warming up to take up the first group of jumpers, and it was apparent that we were set to go in the first group.

Halbert strapped a chute on me and we got in the smallest of the planes along with three very attractive young ladies as the on-lookers cheered us on.

By this time, I sort of figured Halbert was out to kill me. I had no idea what I was doing, and it didn't look like I was going to get much training, as we were already taking off in the plane.

As the plane gained altitude, Halbert told me that I would be on a static line, which means the chute would be pulled for me. I thought to myself, I guess that's good news. Then all of a sudden, the pilot cut back the power, and Halbert slid open the plane's side door.

The last thing I remember is Halbert telling me to step out of the plane, stand on the two steps under the wing, then let go. When I finally regained my senses I was floating in the sky, only to see Halbert and the young ladies fly by me in free fall. I saw them pull their chutes and land right on the x marks in the landing zone with all of the other jumpers and the Wild Bunch cheering.

By this time I was feeling kind of cocky, with my only concern being how I was going to land when I hit the ground. Luckily I landed close to one of the x's, and only slightly sprained my ankle when I hit. What didn't make sense, though, was the fact that everyone watching me make my landing was by now rolling on the ground in laughter, including the attractive young ladies.

I didn't think the landing was that funny. As I gathered up my chute and started to walk toward the crowd, it set in, as each step I took made a squishing sound in my tennis shoes.

I looked down and the whole front of my pants were wet. Wetting your pants in front of all those people is about as embarrassing as it

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FOUNDATIONS—THE JOURNEY

gets, especially when you are 18 years old and think you are bulletproof. And to top off the embarrassment, I had to wear the wet jeans around for the next four hours until we all left in the party bus.

Needless to say, that was the first and last time I ever jumped out of a plane.

Now back to the Halbert/Raunchy partnership.

When I sold Raunchy to Jim, he was a very willing, calm and obedient horse with no real bad habits. Over the course of about a year, Jim turned Raunchy into a flighty, non-trusting partner that had developed some pretty undesirable habits.

Jim never used force on Raunchy, but just his quick, non-rhythmic way of moving around him made him flighty and untrusting. When Jim was around Raunchy he was never thinking of the horse, usually going through the motions while he was talking with his buddies, or thinking of what next business deal he was going to do.

Without Jim giving attention to the “Little

Things that Count,” Raunchy soon picked up annoying habits like pulling away when Jim took off the halter, or constantly walking in front of Jim when being led. Eventually Raunchy was almost impossible to mount since Jim never made him stand still when stepping in the saddle.

Although not the intention of Jim, Raunchy eventually picked up many bad habits by repetition. What happened was a case of learned bad habit behavior.

Jim’s situation is so common and you see it time and time again with horse owners. They forget to practice connection with their horse, and to gain the knowledge necessary to maintain a sound and safe relationship with their equine partner. Before they know it, they have unintentionally taught their horse a lot of bad habits, and then just blame it on their horse. Then when they see it’s not an easy fix, they just lay blame on the horse and make excuses for its behavior.

Remember, your horse’s behavior is a true reflection of your training.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Never Forget That it’s the Little Things That Count

Horses Learn by Repetition;
Unfortunately, Repeating the Same Bad Habits Results in Learned Bad Habit Behavior

Your Horse’s Behavior is a Reflection of Your Training. We Make Up for Our Lack of Commitment, Knowledge and Ability by Making Excuses for Our Horses’ Behavior



Benny and the “Bonanza” Theme Song

Back in the mid seventies when I was still going to college, I spent ten days each summer working as a wrangler on the Roundup Riders of the Rockies (RRR) trail ride.

RRR was an elite, men’s-only club that was comprised of mainly wealthy businessmen that didn’t know a whole lot about horses. The annual ten-day ride was the highlight of the year, and basically a reason for these rich guys to party while playing cowboys.

The ride would start at a different Colorado mountain location each year. On the first day of the ride, Jeton’s Catering out of Dallas, Texas, would roll in with a convoy of trucks and set up camp. The setup would include trucks with hot showers, circus tents with private bunks for the members, a stage for the nightly activities, and a fully-catered tent, including cocktails and food you would expect at a five-star resort.

They had two rules: 1) No women allowed in camp, and 2) Every rider had to make the

ride to the next day’s camp on their horse, no matter how severe the hangover.

As a wrangler, I was assigned ten riders and their horses. I was responsible for the care of the horses, before and after each day’s ride, and basically expected to be at the beck and call of my riders for whatever they might need.

This was really a great gig since the wranglers got to eat the excellent food and use the showers after the members left for the daily ride. And more than anything, the tips I received at the conclusion of the event basically covered most of my college tuition that year.

Anyway, the day would start for us wranglers at 4 a.m. The Boss Wrangler would get us up and we would go out to the picket lines and feed our string of horses. Once fed, we would groom and saddle them up. We would then proceed to ride each horse to make sure they were ready to go for the members. They would then sound a bell, and the riders would all come over to

pick up their horse. Each wrangler had his own system for getting their riders mounted. Some good, some not so good, and in most cases, very comical. Once everyone was mounted, they would play the “Bonanza” theme song on the loudspeaker and they would all ride out single file on the trail.

Once everyone rode off, we would break camp, which included tearing down the massive picket lines that all the horses were tied to during the night. We would then load up all the trucks and head to the next camp-site where we would set up new picket lines and wait around for the riders to arrive.

The evening was really the highlight of the day. They would fire up the “Bonanza” theme song and riders would start coming in. Since the noon break on the trail entailed a helicopter flying in and setting up a bar for a couple hours of partying, most of these guys were plastered by the time they arrived at camp. Some of them were in such bad shape they had to be lifted off of their horse, while others just fell off. It was quite a sight to see.

Well, now to the meat of the story.

The first year I signed on as a wrangler, we were all instructed to meet at a hotel in west Denver and we would all ride in equipment trucks to the first camp location. Just as we were getting ready to leave, a guy pulled in the parking lot honking his horn in an old beat up station wagon. A cowboy jumped out of the passenger

side that could have doubled as the character “Curly” that was played by Jack Palance in the movie “City Slickers” with Billy Crystal. He was a tough looking cowboy with a rolled cigarette in his mouth and a duffel bag draped over his shoulder. He jumped in the back of the truck with us, and off we went.

He introduced himself as Benny from California. I asked him where in California and he said mainly around Northern California where he did seasonal work riding horses for ranch outfits. As it turned out, Benny didn’t own a car, so he rode the Greyhound bus (the big dog as he called it) from Red Bluff to Denver, and hitched a ride from the bus station to our meeting point at the hotel.

From the moment I met Benny I kind of took a liking to this guy who was probably in his early sixties.

He was soft spoken, everything was yes sir, no sir, and all he seemed to have was an interest in talking about horses.

Benny proceeded to explain that this was his tenth year as a wrangler on the ride, and the tips he earned generated a good part of his annual income. As we continued to visit it was obvious that he was fishing to see what my background was, and my way of working with horses. Once he caught on that I was an aspiring young horse enthusiast, always open to learn more about training horses, he really opened up. He explained that he worked on some ranches over the years with two brothers named Tom and

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Bill Dorrance. He said these guys really had a way with horses and that he was working on practicing a lot of their methods. I told him that I had never heard of them, but I would sure be interested in learning whatever I could from him.

As we approached the campsite, Benny looked at me with a serious expression and said, "Beware of Big Don the Boss Wrangler. He is a tough individual that uses force and intimidation to get what he wants from both the people and horses that he is around." I thanked him for the warning as the truck stopped and we jumped out to start unloading.

Late that afternoon the truckloads of horses arrived and we were assigned our horses and riders. Once all the horses were tied to the picket lines and fed, Big Don called us over for a wrangler meeting. He outlined our duties and emphasized that he would not tolerate any misbehavior from any wrangler and the horses that they were responsible for. His pet peeve was horses that pulled back on the picket line, which, he indicated, would be dealt with directly by him.

I glanced over at Benny who gave me a wink as if to say I told you so.

Right after the meeting, everybody but Benny filed over to the mess tent for dinner. I asked why he wasn't going to join us, and his response was that he had work to do. Being

curious, I asked if I could join him.

"Sure," Benny said, "but don't be offended if I don't talk to you while I am working."

"Not a problem," I replied.

For the next few hours I watched Benny take each one of his ten horses out in a field and hobble train them. As he worked with each horse it was evident that he continually watched for expressions on each of their faces, and worked at a different pace and manner with each horse.

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At no time did he ever look over at me or anything else for that matter. His full attention was on what he was doing with his horse. After he was done, all of his horses stood quietly on the picket line while he layed out his sleeping bag in close proximity.

As he started to get ready for bed he motioned me over and said thanks for staying out of my way.

"Okay if I ask you a few questions?" I said.

"Sure," Benny replied.

"First off, why do you hobble train those horses when you are just going to tie them back up to a picket line?"

Benny leaned back and said, "Let's start from the beginning."

This was his explanation:

"First off, you missed an awful lot of what I was doing, but don't feel bad since very few people ever get it. I have learned over the years that horses are so sensitive that they hear you

breathing and sense everything you do around them. I get on their same level of thinking by giving all of my attention to them. And, most importantly, I give them my heart and they are more than willing to give me their heart. If you can do that, you are seventy-five percent there in being a successful horse trainer.

You see, Dave, one of the many things that I learned from the Dorrance brothers and my many years of training is how to interact with horses the natural way vs. intimidation. The key to the natural way is to understand that horses want safety, comfort, and their language is one of following a leader. So everything I do around horses ensures their safety and comfort, while at the same time getting them to trust me as their leader.

Think about it Dave, every herd of horses has a pecking order where every horse establishes his or her rank in the pecking order. As part of a pecking order, they essentially follow all horses above them in the pecking order, with the ultimate leader being the alpha mare. So what that means, Dave, is horses are the ultimate followers of a leader. So what I constantly focus on is my horse viewing me as it's leader.

One of the ways I establish leadership is by hobble training. If done correctly, this is a huge step in getting the horse's attention and getting him to submit to you as his leader. There are other ways of doing it like laying a horse down,

but in most cases, this works just fine. Once they are hobble trained I hobble them while they are tied. Sometimes I will leave them hobbled and tied for an hour or two just to remind them that I am the leader. It does not harm them whatsoever, and really helps build respect and patience.

What you saw me do, in just a few hours, was to start building trust in my string of horses that they are safe around me, and that I am their leader. By the end of the ten days, these horses will be very willing to do whatever I want around them, but still kind of messed up because of what their riders will be doing with them during the day.

Before I learned these ways, I always thought good horse trainers got fast results by being real showy and making it a contest where the trainer was always the winner. Well Dave, it's taken me a lifetime with horses to learn that it doesn't work that way. Good horse training is not a contest, it is very subtle and boring to watch.

You provide a sense of safety and comfort to your horse by connecting heart to heart, breathing together and watching every little mannerism to see what they are feeling and thinking. I use hobble training and other non-abusive methods to gain respect and be viewed as my horses' leader. That's pretty basic stuff, but like I said, most people never get it."

"The key to the natural way is to understand that horses want safety, comfort, and their language is one of following a leader. So everything I do around horses ensures their safety and comfort, while at the same time getting them to trust me as their leader."

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That session really made an impression on me and, more than anything, was the beginning of a friendship with a guy that I really respected, and who taught me a lot about myself and my relationship with horses.

The following year after the Roundup Ride, Benny came to Fort Collins and spent a couple months (as he did the following two consecutive summers) helping me start colts for a local horse breeder. I learned so much from Benny, including Bitting Up Methods, that I have found invaluable for setting a horse's head, and getting them conditioned to and advancing bit aids.

Benny also introduced me to the vaquero methods of training that I still aspire to today.

And two more principles that Benny introduced me to that I find invaluable in training are: "Making it the Horse's Idea," and "Don't Get in the Way of the Horse."

Oh, by the way, early that second morning

in camp, Big Don noticed a gelding pulling back on the picket line. Making sure he had an audience of wranglers and several riders, he quickly untied the horse from the picket line and walked him over to a big stout tree. He tied him up and proceeded to hit him in the face with a rope.

The horse pulled back fighting about twenty times until he finally gave up and just stood there shaking. Benny and I looked at each other knowing that he had broken every rule we had talked about the night before, but hey, everybody else was impressed with what they saw. Unfortunately, that horse and the many others Big Don came in contact with became more untrusting and unwilling partners. And even more unfortunate was the impact it had on the onlookers who thought that this impressive act of training was the right way to handle things.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

It's Not a Contest

Good Horse Training is Subtle and Boring to Watch

Heart to Heart

Breathing With Your Horse

Hobble Training for Leadership

Watching for the Expression in a Horse

Reward for Even the Slightest Try

Finding the Sweet Spot

Vaquero Techniques

Bitting Up Exercises

Make it the Horse's Idea

Don't Get in the Way of the Horse



Chocolate and the Sale Barn

As a college kid I pretty much stayed out of trouble since I spent all of my time either studying or working to pay for school and living expenses.

Work entailed the Roundup Riders stint every summer, working weekend mornings caring for the large animals at the University Vet Clinic, and the afternoons riding horses for a local horse breeder. Then on Thursdays and Fridays, as my class schedule would allow, I would work at the local sale barn sorting, tagging, and pushing cattle.

Jimmy Wise was the yard foreman at the sale yard. He had a stone face with a long flat nose that had obviously been broken a time or two. Jim was a retired saddle bronc rider, and at the age of forty, still was a long way from being able to really retire. Since we had crossed paths during our rodeo careers we got along real well, and he was always willing to work around my class schedule to give me all the hours he could at the sale barn.

Back in the seventies, true redneck-type cowboys like Jim took a real dislike to hippie types, which were pretty characteristic of most kids going to college at that time. Even though I wasn't a pot smoking hippie type, I still sported sort of long hair so that I would kind of fit in on campus.

My hair style finally got to Jim when, late one night after the sale, I walked into the locker room to find Jim and the other cowboys standing there waiting for me. As I entered the room it was obvious that they were up to something as they all just stared and snickered. One of the guys locked the door behind me while Jim stepped forward holding a set of electric sheers that the brand inspector used to shave long-haired cattle to find the brand markings.

Jim looked at me and said, "We can do this the easy way, or the hard way—what will it be"?

Well, things didn't look too good at this point, so I made the decision to make a run

for the door. As I tried to unlock the door they all tackled me, pulled off my hat, and went to shaving.

Since the blades were rough and designed for cutting cattle hair, they left my hair about a quarter-inch in length with uneven blade waves. When they were all done I looked like a bald chicken that had some sort of lice infestation. They all left laughing, with Jim putting his hand on my shoulder saying, “Now you’re one of us again”

Unfortunately, it was against school policy to wear a baseball cap in class, so I was a laughing spectacle at school until it finally grew out several months later. Needless to say from then on, I kept it cut pretty short.

I really had no animosity toward Jim, it’s just the way it was back then between cowboys and hippies, and in this case, cowboys and a hippie look alike changed back to a cowboy.

Now the story on Jim and Chocolate.

Jim would occasionally ride problem horses for folks, especially ones that their owners were afraid of because they had a rearing or bucking problem. Jim really didn’t know much horsemanship, but he was usually somewhat successful straightening out these kinds of horses since he was fearless, and really enjoyed riding bucking horses.

He also savored the opportunity to cowboy a horse in front of an audience. The sale barn had a roping arena and several stalls where the owners let Jim keep two or three horses at a time. Jim didn’t get rich riding these horses, but I’m sure it helped put gas in his pickup.

One afternoon, a big fancy rig pulling a high-dollar horse trailer pulled up to the arena. The guy unloaded a nice three-year-old quarter

horse mare that was kind of a seal brown color. He told Jim that he had bought the horse at the Fort Worth cutting horse auction, but once he got her home and put her on some cows at his place, she just went ballistic and bucked him off. Jim told the guy to give him a week and he should have her lined out—no problem.

About a week later I asked Mel, who was the night caretaker, how Jim was doing with the chocolate mare. He laughed and said that Jim had really met his match with this one. He said she wouldn’t quit bucking, and refused to do anything Jim tried with her, including his normal routine of loping circles in the arena and working along the fence. Even though she couldn’t buck Jim off, his methods didn’t seem to be working.

Up until that point, all I ever knew about Mel was that he lived on the sale barn property, and was responsible for just about every little chore that nobody else wanted to mess with on a 24/7 basis. He fixed everything from leaky toilets to chopping ice every morning on the water tanks. And when the ladies in the café ran out of something, he was the first guy they would call to make a run to the store. He walked hunched over with a limp, apparently from a broken back he sustained years before in a horse wreck.

Another week went by and Mel approached me with an offer. He said that the mare was getting worse, and that Jim was ready to call the mare’s owner and tell him that she was beyond repair. “Knowing you really like working with horses, how about we offer to fix this mare for Jim and the owner?” Mel asked.

Before replying to Mel, I thought to myself: “I don’t really know Mel. He seems like a nice

enough guy and handles himself pretty well around livestock, but what does he really know about training problem horses? I sort of have my own ideas about fixing problem horses, but, what the heck, I am always open to new ideas, and can always learn something new.”

So I looked at Mel and said, “Let’s have a go at it.”

Mel replied by saying he would talk to Jim and get back to me.

A few days later, I met Mel for coffee in the sale barn café. He began the conversation by saying that Jim and the owner agreed to let us give it a try on fixing the mare. The deal was, though, that the owner would only pay \$50 a month for the feed bill, for up to six months, and after six months if she didn’t work out then that would be it. On the other hand, if after six months she turned out to be a good horse that his kids could ride and he could at least work on cows with, he would be willing to give us \$500 each. I scratched my head and asked Mel if he thought this mare was worth putting in the time on since I really had not taken the time to observe her and try to understand what her underlying problems were.

What came out of Mel’s mouth in reply to my question about blew me off of my chair and, to be real honest, was another demonstration of an old timer that really understood horses, and who was another unknown horse whisperer that I had the true pleasure of associating with in my life journey.

Here’s what that little crippled guy had to say:

“I have a lot of respect for Jim and his abilities, but he, like most other horse trainers,

has a set plan on how they are going to train horses. Jim took this mare in and tried putting her through his regular program that he does for every other horse that gets brought to him. Since he gets paid on quick results, he just does whatever it takes to get the buck out of them or whatever other problem they might have. To be truly successful, you have to take the time to read and understand the personality of the horse you are dealing with and, if possible, what has been done to it in the past. You can then use its strengths and weaknesses to your advantage.

I don’t know for sure, but I would bet you that this little three-year-old is a filly that was put on the fast track for cutting and just burned out. Probably from the first day as a two-year-old, they pushed this horse to get her ready for a futurity. Time is money in their business, and in her case I bet she just could not handle the pressure.

If you look at her it’s obvious. Once she enters the arena it’s almost like she has an anxiety attack. She then deals with it by bucking. It’s obvious her buck is a mental deal rather than something hurting her physically. So the first thing we are going to do is load her up, take her to your pasture, and turn her out for a month. Let her see what it’s like to be a horse again, rather than standing in a stall all day. I like to call it a mental vacation. It works the same for horses as it does for people. Always remember that the quickest way to train or fix a problem with a horse is to go slow.

After about thirty days in the pasture I want you to catch her and just start connecting with her. I know you are big on ground work so spend a couple of weeks working her on the ground. At that point, my guess is she is going

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to tell you what she is ready for. Don't get in her way. Just saddle her up, jump on her in the pasture, and let her do her thing. Just spend a week or whatever it takes riding her around the pasture in a relaxed mode. When she's ready to do some work, load her up and bring her back here to the sale barn."

Well we stood up from the table and Mel shook my hand and said good luck partner, keep me posted. As we were shaking hands it occurred to me that we were partners, but based on these instructions I was the partner that was going to be doing all of the work. Oh well.

That afternoon I hauled the mare to my place and turned her out. After being turned out for a month I spent the next month doing groundwork and just riding her around in the pasture. She was a completely different horse, with a relaxed attitude and not even a hint of wanting to buck. I told Mel that I thought she was ready to bring back to the sale barn and asked what the next step would be. Mel said just bring her back and he would show me.

Early the next morning I unloaded her at the yard and asked Mel if I should take her back to the arena. "No," he replied. "Saddle her up

and ask Jim if you can push cattle in the return alley all day. She is at the point where we need to give her a job, and make her feel like what she is doing is her idea."

We spent the day pushing cows down the alley and this filly just absolutely loved it. Instead of getting pushed and jerked in a cutting arena she was now pushing cows with a feeling of accomplishment as I stayed light in her mouth and she moved easily off of my seat and leg aids. It was amazing the progress this horse had made, literally with very little effort over the past sixty days.

As Jim watched us work he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He was such a stand up guy he walked over to Mel and me and congratulated us on the job we had done on the filly.

We spent about a month working the filly in the yard doing various jobs, then took her out in the arena where she worked circles and figure eights relaxed and willing. The owner gave us each our \$500 and hauled her off a happy camper.

Mel turned out to be quite the horse trainer—this experience was invaluable, and to top it off I made \$500.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

The Fastest Way to Train a Horse or Correct a Problem Horse is to Go Slow

Have a Plan, but Be Flexible Enough to Go With the Flow

Horse's Burn Out Just Like People

Don't Get in a Horse's Way, They Will Surprise You

With What They Can Get Done Without Your Interfering

To Be Successful, You Have to Take the Time to Read and Understand
the Personality of Your Horse—Use Their Strengths and Weaknesses to Your Advantage

Always Find a Way to Give a Horse a Job and Make Him Feel Like it's His Idea



Flying with the Ballroom Dancer

Not long after my training experience with Mel and the chocolate-colored filly, I was riding a colt in a pasture that I rented, which was coincidentally the same pasture I first rode Chocolate. This pasture was right next to the Fort Collins airport, which was a private airport with only one small runway.

As I was working this colt on a nice Colorado spring morning, I noticed a biplane doing touch and goes. The pilot then went into a steep climb, only to stall out and end up in a barrel roll. I was so taken with what this pilot was doing in his plane, I probably rode that gelding for forty-five minutes without giving any attention to the horse, and fixating entirely on the activity of the plane.

The pilot finally landed the plane and taxied over to within a hundred yards of the pasture fence and started waving at me to come over

to the plane. Not sure what this guy wanted, I unsaddled the colt, tied him up, and walked over to the plane. As I approached the plane the pilot was still seated with the prop running and he hollered, "Want to take a ride?"

Before I answered I did some quick figuring. Number one, I am scared of heights; number two, I went number one in my pants when I did the sky diving episode; and number three, what the heck, go for it. As the old saying goes, "You don't learn much from a mule's second kick."

So I said okay and introduced myself to Robert, the pilot. He took my cowboy hat and gave me a leather ski mask-looking outfit and a pair of goggles. He strapped me in the front seat and said hang on and enjoy the ride.

It seemed a little odd that the pilot would sit in the back seat and the passenger in the front seat, but what did I know about aviation

and all of that stuff? Well, the takeoff went pretty smooth, as did the touch and goes. I was enjoying it so much that I just couldn't wait to tell my buddies what a stud I was flying in a vintage biplane. (I guess any biplane is vintage, but again, what did I know about aviation?)

Then the tide turned.

Robert put us in a steep Mach 7 climb, stalled, went into a twenty G-force dive, pulled out, and ended up with so many barrel rolls I lost track. As soon as we landed and came to a stop, I jumped out and proceeded to lose my breakfast in the grass next to the runway. I then checked my front side—dry as a bone—so it was a successful flight.

In the meantime, Robert had taxied his plane over to the hanger, so I followed him over to return the goggles and headgear in exchange for my cowboy hat. As we shook hands and I thanked him for the ride he looked over at my horse set up and asked if maybe he could come over and watch me next time I worked horses. I replied by saying it would be a pleasure, and I would be out there first thing in the morning.

Robert said, "I'll see you then."

The next morning Robert showed up wearing nice designer slacks, a high-dollar polo shirt, and shoes/boots that looked like hybrid English riding boots. His hair was slicked back, and I could tell when we shook hands that Robert's soft hands meant he didn't do a lot

of manual labor. Anyway, we sat down in the breezeway of my barn and spent about an hour getting acquainted.

Turns out, Robert was raised in upstate New York, the only son of a wealthy Wall Street businessman. He started riding dressage horses and polo ponies at an early age, which he continued to do until he got interested several years ago in flying and ballroom dancing.

My guess is Robert was around thirty-five

years of age, and never worked a day in his life. He still had his string of polo ponies back home, and said he missed being around horses since he spent summers in Colorado to fly his planes along the front range of the Rocky Mountains and to compete in The Western States Ball Room Dancing Association (I believe it was called).

At first I was a little leery of a rich kid from back East that was a professional ballroom dancer, and from the side he kind of looked like Barney Fife.

Admitting to my buddies that I was hanging out with a guy with these kinds of credentials was a little over the top. But after spending a little time with Robert I got over my concerns since he grew up with horses, and might be someone I could learn something new from.

After about an hour Robert said he had to leave to play golf, and asked if he could come back the next day and maybe just help me with grooming my horses. He promised not to

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take up so much time talking so that I could get some work done. “Okay,” I said. “See you tomorrow.”

Well, Robert showed up every morning for two weeks, and all he did was groom my horses. He didn’t really say much as he would just watch me work horses on the ground and ride, then he would take off for the golf course.

What caught my eye was how Robert did even the mundane stuff like grooming in a concentrated and rhythmic fashion. While around horses it was like he was in a trance, fully focused on the horse, and nothing else, including me, existed. Even when he led a horse, he would walk in rhythm and make it a point to breath with the horse.

This kind of reminded me of the connection and rhythm stuff that I had been introduced to years before by Hank at the race track. I still kind of practiced what Hank had taught me, but over the years I sort of got out of practice.

After that first two weeks it became pretty apparent that my horses were acting a whole lot more relaxed since being around Robert. So I approached him and said I would sure like to spend more time with him and have him explain and teach me his ways around horses. Robert said that, unfortunately, he was leaving the following week to go back home, but would be happy to spend a couple hours giving me feedback on what he had been observing and

some of his methods for training and interacting with horses.

I said, “Great, how about tomorrow morning right here at the barn?”

How about the country club for breakfast instead?” he offered.

“Sure,” I replied.

Since there was only one country club in town, I knew where it was, but obviously had never been inside. As we shook hands and agreed to meet at 8 a.m. at the “club,” Robert looked at me and suggested I may want to clean up a bit, nothing fancy, just clean jeans with no holes, and minus the cowboy hat.

I thought to myself, “The sacrifices us aspiring horse trainers have to make at times.”

I showed up at the “club” the next morning and the host walked me over to the corner table where Robert was already drinking his coffee and reading the *Wall Street Journal*.

This seemed a little unorthodox sitting down in a country club with a rich guy to get horse training advice. I then thought to myself, “What a far cry this situation was from all those nights sitting in ole Heidi’s travel trailer sipping ice tea and talking horses.”

We proceeded to order breakfast, then Robert looked up and took off his half moon reading glasses. He stared me right in the eye and said, “You know the biggest mistake you are

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making as a horse trainer?”

A little surprised with the question, I replied by saying, “I probably make a lot of mistakes, but can’t really think of any that are a huge deal.

“Rhythm,” Robert blurted out. “You have no sense of rhythm around horses. I am going to tell you the importance of rhythm, but first let me tell you what caught my eye the first time I saw you watching me fly the plane. Dave, you were riding a horse giving it little to no attention, which, in my book, is a major flaw in training horses and a sign of pure disrespect for your horse.”

“Boy, I thought to myself, ‘I hope they don’t come and haul me off to jail.’”

Robert took a deep breath as he was kind of worked up at this point.

Then he said:

“Remember Dave, rhythm is the basis for everything we do around horses, whether we are working them on the ground or riding them. We then combine rhythm with relaxation, which is the key to everything we do around horses. Most people never figure out that horses strive on predictability. Steady, uninterrupted rhythm is predictability. Think about it, predictability can help an anxious green horse stay calm and relaxed. The horse begins to trust that nothing abrupt or startling is going to happen. People spend hours trying to desensitize their horse to scary things when, in fact, they should spend

their time practicing rhythm and relaxation.

Developing a good sense of rhythm requires concentration, which is where you are really hurting. To make rhythmic movement a habit, you need to pay attention to the beat of your walk, the pattern of your breathing, and the swing of your knees, your hips, and your shoulders. You can’t multi-task, thinking about what you are going to do for dinner, watching me fly an airplane, or talking to a friend at the same time you are leading your horse, grooming him, or even standing and waiting with him. You have to keep your attention on your horse and your rhythm relationship to him.

*“Rhythm
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around horses,
whether we are
working them
on the ground
or riding them.”*

Notice when I was grooming your horses; I gave them my full attention, and worked in a rhythmic

fashion. As a ballroom dancer, I know how important it is to step in time to a steady beat in order to coordinate with one another and turn in a smooth performance. If you are a rider with a good sense of rhythm, you will walk, turn and stop to a steady beat. You will maintain a sense of rhythm as you catch your horse, pat him, and lead him back to the barn. Dave, did you notice the blissful expression on your horses’ faces as I was grooming them to a steady beat. You probably didn’t, but that’s the power of rhythm.”

Well, with that statement I wasn’t getting much credit for anything from Robert, and he didn’t stop there.

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“I can’t tell you how important this stuff is, Dave. Again, rhythm is a powerful training and riding tool. It helps riders communicate more clearly with their horse through their aids. A horse that is always ridden rhythmically begins to seek out and pick up on a rider’s rhythm. The horse then learns to mirror that rhythm. I know this sounds probably too much like dressage stuff, for a cowboy like you, but when the rider’s joints move in a specific “walk,” or “trot,” or “canter” rhythm, the horse feels that rhythm or beat and responds in a way that matches it. A sense of rhythm is not just essential within a gait, it is also necessary for smooth transitions between gaits. And remember this, Dave, if a horse spooks or runs off, a rider who has cultivated a strong sense of rhythm can use that rhythm to regain the horse’s attention, calm him down, then reintroduce something to control him.”

I took a lot of notes to make sure I didn’t miss anything Robert had to say. After he finished his sermon on rhythm, I kind of looked at him with a puzzled gaze as it seemed like he used the word rhythm a million times and it was the most important thing to him as far as working with and training horses. Other than Hank at the race track, this was the first time I had run across someone who was so adamant about practicing rhythm so religiously.

As we finished breakfast and stood up to leave, I thanked Robert for his time and his training advice. His parting words to me were, “If you practice what I have told you it will forever change your relationship with horses for the better.”

And you know what? Many years later, after practicing what he told me with every horse I came in contact with, I can honestly say Robert was right.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Rhythm

Relaxation

Rhythm has an Element of Predictability

Developing a Good Sense of Rhythm Requires Concentration

Rhythm Helps Riders Communicate More Clearly with Their Horse Through Their Aids

Rhythm is the Foundation of a Good Dressage or Reining Performance

Horse and Rider are Like Dance Partners and the Interplay Between Horse and Rider
Can Only Be as Good as the Lowest Level that Either Partner has Achieved

“The Ranch” and the Driftwood Mare



After graduating from college in the late seventies I moved to Chandler, Arizona, to begin a career in ag-banking. I spent a few years taking in colts and riding them in my spare time and going to some of the clinics that the early natural horse guys started doing, like John Lyons.

Then in the early eighties I took a couple years hiatus from banking and worked on a development project in the White Mountains of Arizona called “The Ranch.”

This project was the brainchild of a guy named Ben Brooks who was best known in Arizona for buying big tracks of land in the middle of nowhere, cutting them up into 40 acre parcels, then selling the parcels to city folks who dreamed of building a cabin someday.

The Ranch project was Ben’s first and last

development project where he bought an old cattle ranch in the White Mountains and turned it into a makeshift dude ranch where you could own a piece of the ranch by buying an undivided interest. This was a concept pretty common in California at the time, but the first of its kind in Arizona.

With state and federal land leases the ranch was about 80,000 acres in size, so as an undivided interest owner you could tell someone you owned an 80,000 acre ranch, and just not tell them you owned it with 5,000 other people. With that many owners it got awful crowded on a July 4th weekend when everyone left the sweltering Phoenix heat to come to the high elevation ranch to ride horses, punch cows, and have a real chuck wagon barbecue.

Ben hired me as the ranch foreman, which

was quite a switch from an ag-banker role, but what the heck, this was a way to get back to working around horses full time again, and live on a beautiful ranch.

I figured I would milk this deal as long as I could. A few of my responsibilities included buying and maintaining all of the horses and tack for a hundred-horse dude string and hiring all of the wranglers. I was also in charge of the 200-head mother cow herd and the cowboys that cared for the cows, maintained fence, and more. And since Ben and his three other partners were high rollers, I also had the task of buying some classy horses for these guys to ride around on the weekends and show off to the owners.

Before I get to the part of buying the classy horses, an interesting side story to give you some flavor of the Ranch experience.

Ben had about twenty sales people that would come to the ranch from Phoenix every weekend to do whatever it would take to sell a potential owner a piece of the ranch. The potential owners ran the gamut. Most were middle class families from the Phoenix area who were drawn to the ranch by an ad in the newspaper promising a free horseback ride and authentic chuck wagon barbecue.

Ben's sales folks were a pretty wild bunch, and real successful at selling these undivided interests since they had been trained at selling forty-acre parcels for so many years.

Every Saturday night, all the sales people,

the ranch employees, and Ben's entourage would drive about five miles down the road to the Long Branch Saloon.

The Long Branch was a low rent bar owned by a retired couple from back East. It sat in the middle of nowhere, and until the Ranch crew started hanging out, they probably never had more than five or six customers per day. The husband, who went by the name of Slim, was a long, lanky guy with a beard, probably in his late forties. Gerdy, his wife, was about the same

age, pretty rough looking, about twice his weight, and had a real deep voice.

Well, one Saturday night everybody was whooping it up having a great time. The jukebox was playing and the dance floor was full, including Slim, who was pretty liquored up and cutting the rug with one of Ben's lady salespeople.

Gerdy was bartending, and after Slim and his new lady friend finished their first dance, they waited to start the next dance together. Gerdy took notice and looked to be pretty irritated.

After several more dances together, Gerdy had enough and threw an empty beer bottle at Slim, who was still on the dance floor with his lady friend. The bottle barely missed his head, and he just kept right on dancing.

That made Gerdy even more mad, so she hollered at Slim and said, "You better quit or you know what happens next."

Slim didn't miss a beat, and kept on dancing.

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Next thing we see is Gerdy coming from behind the bar with a 22 pistol. She walked up to within twenty feet of Slim and shot him right in the behind. He fell on the floor hollering while Gerdy went back behind the bar and took off her apron.

The whole place got quiet and Gerdy announced that the bar was now closed since she had to drive Slim to the hospital again.

She picked Slim up off of the dance floor, carried him out the door, and threw him in the back of their pickup. As she was getting in the pickup you could hear her complaining that it was just her luck that this would have to happen on a busy night.

The next Saturday night, everybody showed up at the Long Branch and it was business as usual.

Except this time, Slim was behind the bar, limping, and sober as a nun.

Come to find out this was the fourth time he had been shot (all in the same place) by Gerdy for dancing with other women since owning the Long Branch.

Now that's a marriage made in heaven, and one story that I will never forget from my "Ranch" days.

Talk about a wife that is a pain in the you know what.

Now back to the horses.

Ben gave me instructions, and a blank check to go buy four real nice horses for him and the other three investors. Ben put in his order for a

nice sorrel with white stockings to match John Wayne's favorite horse, Dollar.

One of the other investors wanted a buckskin to match Marshall Dillon's "Gunsmoke" horse, and the other two wanted all-black horses.

It took a while, but I first filled the bill buying both the sorrel and buckskin gelding. I then saw an ad in the Phoenix newspaper advertising good broke horses with Driftwood blood lines. I called and they said they had a

couple black geldings that were good broke horses and would make excellent baby sitters.

I drove down to Phoenix and met with the guy and his wife selling the horses. Sure enough, these black geldings had a lot of chrome and were everything the owner promised. I rode each one

for about an hour, and negotiated a price that included a thirty-day money-back guarantee.

I wrote them a check and loaded the horses up in the trailer. As I was getting in the truck to leave, the owner walked up and asked me if I had any interest in a nice buckskin mare. I said I really didn't need any more horses and my budget was pretty used up. He replied by saying he would make me a deal I could not refuse.

Curious, I got back out of the truck and followed him over to the barn. Standing in the stall was probably one of the nicest looking buckskin mares I had ever seen. From a confirmation standpoint she was near perfect. She had a nice eye, but a lot of bone over the

*Next thing we see
is Gerdy
coming from behind the bar
with a 22 pistol.
She walked up
to within twenty feet
of Slim and shot him
right in the behind.*

top of the eye socket, which usually means a possible stubbornness trait.

She was a Driftwood Ike mare with clean papers, and just turning five years old. So I said to the owner, "Okay, there must be something pretty seriously wrong with this mare if you are trying so hard to unload her."

He smiled and said she was an alpha type mare that was extremely stubborn, and at times was outright dangerous. He said her mother was exactly the same way, and after having this filly and seeing that she turned out the same as the mother, he never bred her back, and just sent her off to a sale.

As I approached her in the stall, she wheeled around to kick me, then laid her ears back ready to bite. The owner laughed and said sometimes she calls your bluff and other times she really will let you have it.

"Anyway," he said, "I have a reputation for selling good horses, and I just need to get rid of her since I don't want her as a brood mare, either."

I then asked if she had ever been ridden.

"Oh yeah," he replied, "When we broke her as a two-year-old, she was okay for about six months, then all hell broke loose. She reared over and put one of my good trainers in the hospital, and every cowboy I put on her since then has either been bucked off or she scraped them off along the fence."

Since I could keep this mare at the ranch

for free, and I had no other horses to work on, I thought, *what the heck, take a flyer and see what you can do with her.*

So I looked at the owner and asked how much he would pay me to haul her off. He kind of laughed and said if I just hauled her to the sale and lead her through the ring I would get at least a \$1,000 for her.

"Maybe that's what you should do," I said, "as long as you can sleep at night knowing someone bought her not knowing she could really get them hurt."

"Okay," he said, "Load her up and I'll just give her to you for free."

A couple of his cowboys got a halter on her and loaded her in the back of my gooseneck trailer behind the black geldings. He signed over the papers

and off I went headed back to the ranch.

For about a week I kept her turned out in a small pasture and just kind of watched her. She was such a nice mover with great eye appeal. What a shame she was such a knot head.

The following week I started doing some ground work with her that included hobble training her. After learning hobble training years back from Benny and its benefit in establishing leadership, I hobble trained all of my horses and continue to do so today.

Unfortunately with this mare, the hobble training and the other methods I tried to get her respect didn't work at all. Everything I did with her she showed disrespect and a complete lack

*"She reared over
and put one of my
good trainers in the hospital,
and every cowboy
I put on her since then
has either been bucked off
or she scraped them off
along the fence."*

of attention. She was definitely going to take a lot of time and effort. Most people with a horse like this would just give up and use force as a last resort. I would never do that, but believe me, this mare was so bad that the thought did cross my mind, but only for a second.

So the weeks went by and I kept doing groundwork stuff and trying to figure out this mare. I kept telling myself that she would teach me how to figure her out, but as yet it just wasn't clicking.

One evening after dinner I was sitting on the front porch of the Ranch house with Gus and Bill, the two ranch cowboys. Gus was an old guy around sixty-five years old. He was the quiet type who just liked the ranch life and had been doing it all of his life. Bill, on the other hand, was

a young guy that talked a lot, and didn't listen to much of anything except himself.

As we sat there, Bill looked at me and said, "You must be awful scared to get on that buckskin mare since all you have done since you got her is play with her on the ground."

By this point in my career, I was used to cowboys making fun of my ground work since the cowboy way is to man up and just jump aboard. So I didn't reply and just kind of sat there while Bill continued to rattle on.

Then Gus looked up and said, "She's a real handful isn't she?"

I said, "She sure is, and I am running out of ideas. If I can't get her to respect me on the

ground, she will never respect me when I get on her."

Gus looked over and said, "You might try laying her down."

"Why so?" I replied.

"Well, I saw a natural horse guy at a clinic lay a horse down to get him over a bucking problem," Gus said. "He claimed it is the ultimate in gaining respect from a horse, and a lot of times a last resort that really works."

I then asked Gus if he knew the technique for laying them down. He said maybe not exactly how the trainer did it, but he had a method for laying horses down that he used to practice years ago on hard-to-shoe horses.

So the next morning Gus showed up and we took the mare out in the

paddock and saddled her with an old saddle. Gus showed me how to lift the front left foot, start rocking her, then flex her head to the right until she would start to lay down. We did this for about a week, always letting her get back up at her will, and never forcing her to stay down.

Then after about a week she got to where she would lay down willingly and stay down until you cued her to get back up. Another week went by and I just worked on laying her down and rubbing her all over. She really started to relax and became a lot more responsive on the ground exercises.

Now that her attitude was getting better, I started running her through my biting up

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exercises that I had learned from Benny.

Usually, if they have a rare back problem they will give it a try when bit up, and these exercises will get them through it without the rider taking the risk of getting hurt. As it turned out, she did fine, never offering to buck or rare back. So a week of biting up exercises and she was setting her head, coming off the bit, and really starting to relax.

Now the next step was getting on.

I stayed relaxed, swung aboard and just walked her around the paddock for a couple of days without any problems. The next day, when I worked on transitions asking her to lope from a trot, she would start to crow hop and I would have to bend her around to get her to quit. Once she quit I would put her to work disengaging her hindquarters. I would then lay her down until she relaxed, then jump back on her and try again.

After about a week of this routine and she was over the crow hopping.

I rode her the rest of the summer and fall, advancing her to a Mona Lisa spade bit that she carried perfectly and just loved its feel. She was light and soft, and really loved being ridden as a pleasure horse, as well as tracking cows.

I ended up having a friend show her that following January in a western pleasure class at the Arizona National Livestock Show where she placed second in a class of twenty-six.

She turned out to be a great mare and I ended up selling her for a big chunk of change to a lady who took her on the amateur show circuit.

Had it not been for Gus and laying this mare down, who knows where she would have ended up? I was just glad she turned out to be a productive and happy horse and, oh, by the way, the money was pretty nice, too.

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

Laying a Horse Down to Establish Leadership and Respect

Ray Hunt and the Dorrance Brothers

Ray Hunt wasn't the first horseman to travel a different path in handling horses, utilizing what has now become known as "natural horsemanship," but he was probably the person most responsible for teaching others about it.

As you can see from reading my previous stories, I ran into quite a few great horsemen and horsewomen who took a different path in handling horses, much like Ray, but the exception is that Ray really formalized this approach by teaching his ways to others. Ray was one of the first people to hold horse-handling clinics, long before they were called clinics.

His students now continue his teaching methods around the world, showing horse enthusiasts that there is a better way to train and work with horses.

Born in Idaho, Ray grew up on a ranch between Mountain Home and Bruneau, where his father raised workhorses and hired out as a teamster on neighboring ranches during the thirties.

As a young man, Ray worked on ranches in Nevada, then married and moved his family to California where he continued to work on various ranches, starting a lot of young horses. He got to be good friends with Bill and Tom Dorrance, who had a lot of influence on his training methods.

Tom helped Ray with a very difficult horse named Hondo that Ray eventually showed as a top competitor in working cow-horse classes. Tom Dorrance had a unique way with horses, and Ray became the person Tom mentored to

communicate his message to other people. After working with Tom, Ray spent forty-five years teaching other horsemen and horsewomen.

Ray passed away in March 2009. I am fortunate that I had the opportunity to meet Ray in 2000 when I attended one of his clinics in Wyoming. I learned a lot from Ray not only at his clinic, but also by reading and studying his training methods and philosophies.

The following are some of the takeaways from Ray that have meant the most to me:

A lot of folks are getting to where they understand the horse more, and are not so quick to blame the horse for a problem. That's a big step.

When you have a problem with a horse, you need to look at what happened before what happened happened. This is basic in trying to understand the horse. We are the teacher, but learn the most by listening to the horse.

The human is full of opinions, but the horse is the truth.

I can't teach you this, I can only make you aware.

It doesn't have to be a struggle. You are dealing with a 1,000 pound-plus animal and you are not going to win by using force. You must work with the horse's mind. It goes from your hands to their minds, to their feet. You control their feet through your mind.

In order to work with horses' minds, however, you have to really understand their mind. You have to make the right thing easy and the wrong thing difficult. That is the essence

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of feel. You have to understand things from the horse's point of view, and then let your idea become their idea. Then you will get everything you ask for.

And probably the take away from Ray that has made the most impact on my relationship and success with horses was this:

We can all get along together if we try to understand one another. You will meet a lot of people and have a lot of acquaintances, but as far as having friends, they are rare and very precious. But every horse you ride can be your

friend, because you ask this of them.

This is real important.

You can ask the horse to do your thing, but you ASK him, you offer it to him in a good way. You fix it up and let him find it. You do not make anything happen, no more than you make a friendship happen.

Ray and his teachings are truly an inspiration. He was a legend in his own time, and his legacy will live on through his students and all who come after.



Just Right Schools and Training

Ray had a dozen or so natural horsemanship students that he took under his wing to teach them his ways. These folks are out there today with their own programs doing clinics and producing training videos that incorporate many of the methods they learned from Ray. Just like my program, they all have their own identity, but for the most part, the methods and philosophies of natural horsemanship are all pretty similar.

I have studied the programs of most of these individuals, as well as some of the well- and not-so-well-known trainers out there that were not associated with Ray. I have found that there are some great trainers and programs, and some not so great trainers and programs.

Nevertheless, I am the first to admit that I have learned a lot from other trainers, and will continue to do so. I am never close-minded enough to think that I know everything. I learn something new every day from both the horses and people I come in contact with.

Anyway, back in the late nineties, I started putting on clinics at my place, initially for the people that had a horse in training with me.

Like every other aspiring modern day horse trainer, I promptly built a website to advertise my services, and named it “Dave Rossiter’s Just Right Horsemanship.”

As I grew in popularity, I probably had five or six horses in training at any one time, and put on five or six clinics per year. My clinics grew to include both horse training clients and outside students. Not a big name, but I built a pretty decent reputation with a lot of mainly back-yard horse folks living in Arizona.

As I got more into the clinic deal, it became more and more apparent to me that one can be a really great horse trainer, but to be successful at training people to be successful with their horses is an entirely different story. That’s about the time I realized that my niche would be to take all of my horse training knowledge and incorporate that into a practical program that focuses on training people to be successful with their horses.

So really, over the last ten years I have concentrated on formalizing a program that focuses on training people. And it was the many opportunities I had to work hands-on with the many folks of varying experience levels, in my back yard clinics, that gave rise to my “Horse Sensible” Horsemanship Program.

This “Just Right” part of my Journey was really great since I got to meet a lot of fellow horse enthusiasts, and at the same time I had the unique opportunity to train a lot of horses.

Summary

Well, I hope you enjoyed reading these stories as much as I enjoyed writing them and sharing them with you.

Even though I have many more experiences that I could share with you, I thought these were the most important as far as emphasizing the principles that are the foundation of my program. And my hope is that these principles will be easier for you to understand and practice since you now have a background of where they came from.

Also, as we work together through my program and I emphasize a specific principal, it will hopefully be more familiar and acceptable to you since you can relate it to a story.

Thanks again for sharing the Journey with me, and remember to keep these principles in mind as you proceed through the following sections of “Foundations,” where we discuss how to put them into practice.

Enjoy the ride!

From the Horse's Mouth

After reading the Journey section of Foundations, you might be feeling a little bit overwhelmed. Don't worry, it's not that complicated. Learning the language of the horse is really quite simple if you commit to understanding how a horse thinks, and to using techniques that are horse sensible.

So to get started, there is no better way to understand a horse than having it come straight from the horse's mouth. We all know that is not possible, but if we could interview a horse I think it would go something like this:

Human:

As a horse trainer trying to figure out how to learn your language can you tell me about you and your species?

Horse:

I'll be glad to, but first let me congratulate you on asking a great question, and one that most people generally don't ask, since they already think they know our kind and they have their own agenda on how they think they can get us to do what they want us to do. But anyway, I will do my best to explain myself and my kind.

Human:

Believe me, I really am interested, so keep going.

Horse:

Before you can ever hope to understand, let alone control and communicate with us, it is important to know our basic psychology and what motivates our behavior in the first

place. First and foremost, we are prey animals and flight animals. I think it is really difficult for you humans to appreciate what it is like to be a horse. Even though we have been domesticated for thousands of years, we still have these instinctive behaviors. Like it or not, every waking moment of my life I fear for my life thinking that around every corner, or down every trail, there may be a predator waiting to eat me for lunch.

Also, it's important to recognize that we are herd animals, meaning our survival is dependent on the herd. As the old saying goes, there is safety in numbers. I will get more specific later, but every movement we make has meaning, and when we are given the choice, we will always move to the protection of the herd.

Human:

Hopefully you can get more specific on these instincts and how we can use them to better communicate with you. But before we go there, tell me about your physical and mental characteristics. Let's start with your eyes, I have always heard that you have great vision since you have such big eyes. Is that true?

Horse:

Yes, that's partly true, so let me explain. We have the largest eyes of any land mammal, and we are lateral eyed meaning our eyes are positioned on the sides of our heads. We have a range of vision of more than 350 degrees, with approximately sixty-five degrees being

binocular vision, and the remaining 285 degrees monocular vision. So we have excellent day and night vision, but let me explain it further.

Our eyes have a “ramped retina.” What that means is, it does not form a true arc; parts of our retina are closer to the lens than the other parts. As a result, we adjust our range of vision by lowering and raising our head, much the same as you humans would do with trifocal glasses.

So our vision is most convenient for grazing and watching for enemies at the same time, but it is a real disadvantage when it comes to judging height and distance. When we approach a strange jump, we have to lower our head, then raise it to determine the height of the jump. And this is one you humans rarely understand. When you take us from a brightly lit area for loading in a trailer, we prefer to lower our nose to the floor of the trailer, then raise our head up high for loading. We are simply trying to find the head position that gives us the best possible vision.

Human:

Wow, that’s interesting to know. What about colors?

Horse:

We are color blind. We don’t perceive blue streams running through a green field with trees in fall colored leaves. All we see is a drab mosaic landscape with different amounts of light reflecting on it

Human:

What about seeing things when we are riding you down the trail? Can you pick out a rabbit sitting in a bush?

Horse:

Objects that remain still convey very little information to our brain unless it’s something different in a setting that we are used to. For example, if you park a tractor next to the arena that we work in, we will notice something new in our setting and may need to check it out. Otherwise, when you’re riding us down the trail, a sitting rabbit or bird may be seen easily by you, but remains obscure to us until it moves. So we see movement instantly and react according to the temperament, experience, and confidence of you as the rider. Those of us who are lucky enough to romp in fields where rabbits and birds are common pay little attention to them, whereas those unlucky soles that live in a stall all day may shy pretty badly at their sudden movement.

Human:

What about size and position of your eyes?

Horse:

Like I said earlier, we have the largest eyes of all the land mammals. The size and position of our eyes and width of our head and body all have an affect on how we see in front and behind us. Those of us with large, wide-set eyes have more forward and rear vision than others. Even so, we still have blind spots at both ends of us. That’s why it’s a good idea not to approach us directly from the rear, and why you should give us some indication when you are passing behind us. Just some friendly advice.

As far as our frontal vision, it is affected by the width of our forehead, and how our eyes are set in our head. Most of us probably don’t see objects nearer than three feet directly in

front of our faces without moving our heads. So most of the time if you are standing right in front of us, you are a blur. That's why we prefer you approach and pet us from the sides. And oh, by the way, when our heads are in a normal position, we don't see the ground we walk on, or the feed we are eating.

Human:

Boy, you horses really do see a lot differently than we humans do. Depending on where your eyes are placed on your head can have a real affect on how well you can see.

Horse:

It sure can, and let me give you an example. Those of us that are pig-eyed or have sunken eyes see less in front and behind than others. You humans classify us as being mean. In reality we are normal and useful if we are understood, but most of you don't realize that we were picked on more by other horses growing up and, as a result, we developed disposition problems. Because of this, most of you humans discriminate against us. And just one other comment I would make regarding our vision—knowing how our vision works, give us a free rein when riding on the trail so that we can negotiate obstacles. What I mean is, allow us to concentrate when traversing rough terrain, because we must remember the ground is under our feet since we can't see it.

Human:

That's some great information on your vision, and I understand it a lot better now. How about giving us a few comments on your sense of hearing?

Horse:

Most of us have really good hearing, although

some of us are almost deaf. Our ears rotate on our moveable heads and along with our long necks, we hear pretty well from all directions. In fact, the pinna of each of our ears can rotate up to 180 degrees, giving us the potential for 360 degree hearing without having to move our head. We can also hear high tones that you humans can't hear. Sometimes if we are high strung, we might show anxiety or stress because we hear something that you humans can't hear. Also, our fear of parades, loud machines, and gunshot noises may be a result of actual pain to our ears. In fact, some of us that are subjected to loud noises like gunshots for an extended period of time may actually lose our hearing.

Human:

How about your sense of smell?

Horse:

I would say for the most part we have a good sense of smell. It is much better than your sense of smell, but it is not our strongest asset. We rely to a greater extent on our vision. Anyway, smell probably dictates our grazing habits, although it does not always keep us from eating poisonous plants. Also, stallions can identify a mare in heat from great distances downwind, so I would say that's a pretty good sense of smell. I can also identify certain humans by smell. And just a piece of advice since we are talking about smell, here's a situation you can use our sense of smell to your advantage. When saddling us up for the first few times, allow us to smell the blanket and saddle before putting them on us. This reassures us that they are not dangerous because, due to the smell, we can determine

that they have been used by other horses.

Human:

Thanks for the advice. How about a few comments on your skin and physical sensitivity areas?

Horse:

We vary quite a bit on skin sensitivity, but overall we are pretty sensitive and can feel a small fly anywhere on our skin. We love to be groomed and have our backs scratched. On that subject, you need to be careful with the type of grooming equipment you use on those of us that are thin skinned. A good rule of thumb is to never use a metal curry comb on us below our knees. That can be pretty painful.

Human:

Do you have areas that are more sensitive than others?

Horse:

Nerve endings in you humans are more abundant in your mouth, feet, and hands. Our most sensitive areas are on our face, nose, mouth, ears, forehead, withers, underside of our belly, lower flanks, upper inside of our legs, coronet band, and the back side of our fetlocks. We are medium sensitive on the jowl part of our head, outside of our legs, inside of our lower legs, ribs, and back. And our toughest area is our neck, shoulders, and rump. When using a bit in our mouth, it should be done with care and reins should be handled with light hands. Otherwise, the sensitivity in our mouth is lost and the result is we get a hard mouth. As far as our flanks, many of us are ticklish in that area. This sensitivity can result in our wanting to buck if your heels are

applied there.

Human:

Any advice on how you like to be touched?

Horse:

In general, we liked to be rubbed, not tickled, patted, or slapped. We enjoy being rubbed on our forehead, neck, withers, back, croup, and chest. Some of us, but not many, like being rubbed on our sensitive areas like our flank, girth, belly, nose, ears, or legs. So when you first start working with us, handle us in places we enjoy, and gradually get us used to our sensitive areas.

I'm sure you are going to talk about this in greater detail later on, but remember that using our skin sensitivity is the primary means of communicating with us via applying pressures, and releasing those pressures when we do the right thing. You guys are the expert on that, so I won't go into it any further until I explain instinctive and learned behaviors.

Human:

You're right, we are going to talk about that a lot as we go through our program. Before we move on to the mental side of things, give us your take on understanding our voice commands.

Horse:

It's funny that you humans will talk to us like we are your pet dog. Actually, we can discern a wide variety of voice commands if you are willing to take the time. We can quickly make an association between physical aids and voice commands. Then eventually you can use the verbal cue alone to achieve the same response if you desire. If you're so inclined to use voice commands, they should be consistent in the

word used, the pitch, the inflection, and the volume. My experience is the most widely used voice commands are “Eeeesy” to calm us down, “Whoa” to stop, and cluck or kiss to accelerate. Also, in many cases it can help to sing or hum along when you are with us. This seems to relax you, which in turn will relax us.

Human:

That gives us a great perspective for your physical aspects. Now let’s dive into your mental aspects. How does your brain and mental capacity compare to us humans?

Horse:

Well, to start with, the bad news for us is that our brain is only about one third the size of yours. As a result, we don’t do very well on limited intelligence tests. The good news, however, is that we are considered to have memories second only to our distant cousin the elephant.

In the wild, if an attack came at a certain place, the herd avoided that spot in the future. If it were not for our great memories, it would be much less useful to you humans in communicating with us. The good news is, if you train us well as a young horse, we will never forget it. The bad news is, if you do a poor job of training us as a young horse, we will never forget that either. For that reason, bad habits should be recognized and corrected by you before they become fixed in our brain.

Even though we have limited intelligence, we can still learn to do very complex things routinely when trained correctly. Also, you may have known one of my older counterparts that was considered highly intelligent because

he could open most gates and doors on the farm. The truth is, when we are bored, we seek activity, some of which may involve gate latches. Once we succeed, our good memory keeps us trying to open gates and doors. So it’s more of a memory deal than an intelligence deal.

Human:

What do you think about when you are standing in a stall?

Horse:

In general, we think in the here and now. We don’t think about training sessions we had a year ago, or think about what we will be doing a year from now. But remember, that’s not the same thing as having a great memory.

Human:

Do you ever get attached to a human like a pet dog would?

Horse:

Not really. We can be your companion for years then move to another owner and form new relationships with his or her horses. You would be long forgotten. And I know you hate to hear this, but our best human friends are those that feed us morning and night.

Human:

While we are on the subject of companionship, do you get in a bad mood or lonely if you don’t have other horses to interact with?

Horse:

Absolutely we do. We are herd animals, and our safety and well being depend on our being around and interacting with our own kind. My recommendation for those of you who keep your horse by himself is to at least get a barn buddy for him, like a goat.

Human:

That makes a lot of sense. Unfortunately, many of us can't afford two horses, so the goat advice is a great idea. Let's get back to your instincts and how they affect your thinking.

Horse:

Let me start by saying that behaviors in the animal kingdom, including humans, are either instinctive or learned. We being the horse have seven categories of instinctive behaviors, which are those behaviors that are fully formed at birth. They include flight (react first, think later), reproductive, combative (defensive and aggressive behaviors), ingestive (eating and drinking), eliminative (what comes out the other end), gregarious (drawn to the herd), and investigative behaviors (once we know something will not eat us, we become very curious).

Human:

That's good to know, but how do your instinctive and learned behaviors apply to communicating with you?

Horse:

Good question, and listen closely, because this is real important: You need to know and understand our instinctive behaviors so that you can influence us through training and distinguish them from learned behaviors. So let me give you an example. Say you go to bridle me for the first time and I jerk my head in avoidance and you take the bridle away and back off for a few seconds. I just learned that to avoid the bridle I should throw my head up. The first time I did this was maybe an instinctive reaction to a scary stimuli, but if my reaction is rewarded by throwing my

head because the stimulus goes away, I have now learned something. Now the second time I jerk my head away from the bridle, it is a learned behavior.

So even though we are highly trainable and our memory is excellent, our capacity for reasoning and problem solving is, to be honest with you, pretty bad. When we encounter a problem (let's say there is an annoying pull on our mouth from the bit) we begin to experiment on what we must do to make that annoying thing go away. So we pull on the rein, throw our head, root with our nose, and keep guessing until we guess right and move our nose in the direction of the pull. Then at that critical moment, if we are met with an instant release, we learn the right answer and next time we feel the pull on the bit, we will remember to give in to the pressure to get the release. You see, it's pretty simple. We don't try to reason our way out of a problem by wondering where the stimuli came from or what meaning it might have. We simply just start guessing in our reactions until it goes away. Whatever I was doing and wherever I was at that moment, is what I think made the pressure go away. That's why the timing of the release of pressure is so critical.

Human:

Boy that's a great explanation. That really helps me understand the whole concept of timing and release. I guess that means your learned behavior through pressure and release doesn't matter from your perspective if it's the right or wrong thing to do in the eyes of we humans.

Horse:

You got that right. In fact, most of the problems

you have with us stem from learned behaviors and bad timing on the part of you, the handler or trainer. Whatever you are doing when you release us is what you are training us to do, for better or worse. With that said, you should only release us from a pressure, directive, or stimuli when we give you the right response. And I can't over emphasize that the timing of the release is critical—you only have a three-second window of opportunity in order for us to make an association with our actions and the release. The sooner in the three seconds the release comes, the more likely we are to form an association and the ideal timing for the release is really half a second.

Human:

You know, this might be a good stopping point to review what you have told us so far. So let me do a quick retake. Your behavior is driven by the fact that you are prey and flight animals as well as herd animals. When comparing your physical aspects to that of us humans, your eyesight is much different and presents a lot of challenges for us humans to understand just how different your eyesight really is from ours.

As far as your sense of smell, it's much better than ours and, in most cases, unless you have gone deaf from repeated loud noises, your hearing is pretty good, and you have the ability to hear things we humans can't.

And as far as your skin, you can vary horse to horse, but for the most part you are very sensitive, especially the areas of your mouth, neck, shoulders, flank, and feet.

And to round out the physical aspects, let me mention one that you failed to touch on,

that being your size and strength. You guys weigh 1,000-plus pounds vs. us humans that are less than a quarter that size, (although with the skyrocketing obesity rate in us humans, this gap is closing). We are no match for your size and strength, which means that the only realistic way for us to control your body and feet is via your mind. I'm sure you would agree with that since you don't take well to physical force. Sound good so far?

Horse:

Very good, keep going.

Human:

Now the mental aspects: You have limited intelligence since your brain is about a third the size of ours. However, you have a memory that is only second to an elephant. I can't remember what happened yesterday let alone a year ago, so most of you horses have me beat. Anyway, your great memory can be used to our advantage or disadvantage in training, depending on whether we do a good or bad job.

You guys think in the here and now, and don't really think about what you did in the past or think about what you're going to do in the future. As far as companionship, we learned from you that you basically strive on companionship with your own kind, and don't really put a premium on having a personal relationship with us humans. It kind of hurts to hear that absent the company of one of your own kind, you prefer a goat to us humans.

And probably the most interesting so far was your discussion on instinctive and learned behaviors. More specifically, the take away on

how your learned behaviors are taught right or wrong by the concept of pressure and the correct timing of the release of that pressure.

How did I do?

Horse:

Not bad, where do you want to go from here?

Human:

Now that we understand your physical and mental characteristics, let's get down to the nitty gritty, and find out what is really important to you as a horse, and how we humans can use that to effectively communicate with you.

Horse:

I like to talk about what makes me happy, so if I go off in a tangent, just stop me and point me back in the right direction.

Let's start by me describing my line of thinking. First off, we have a hard time thinking of more than one thing at a time. I guess you could say we have two sides to our brain, the reactive side and the thinking side. The reactive side is where we think based on our instincts. We use our reactive side when we view something as a predator and our safety and comfort is in jeopardy.

The thinking side, on the other hand, is the side of the brain we use when we are relaxed and non threatened. We like this side of our brain because we experience comfort, and it's the state of mind where we can learn things from you humans very easily.

I'll keep touching on that concept, but for now, let's talk specifically about the three things I want most in life: Safety, Comfort, and Leadership.

One of the most fundamental concepts in

understanding us is that beyond all else in life, what we want is safety, comfort and leadership. We do not want to fear for our lives, we want to feel safe, comfortable, and taken care of. That way we can relax and not have to think too hard or make any decisions. So really what we want is a benevolent leader that will provide us with security and comfort.

Let me discuss each one and I will try to explain how you can use these wants in life to your advantage when trying to communicate with us.

Let's talk Safety: This instinct is so strong we are known to do some pretty drastic and dangerous things when we think our safety is in jeopardy. Since our only means of defense is to run, we normally revert to this tactic when we are scared. Unfortunately, in most cases we run and ask questions later.

So basically, as far as our safety is concerned we view everything other than our own kind as a potential predator, humans included. In our interactions with humans, we view you as an attacking predator until your body language, actions, and mind set prove to us that you are a non-attacking predator.

Let me give you an example: We have cousins called gazelles that live in Africa. They are much like us in the sense that they are prey animals, and their only line of defense is to flee from a predator. When a prey animal like a big cat approaches the herd of gazelles, they all get nervous and take off. They sense from the body language and mind set of the cat that he is after them. Once he has downed a gazelle and dragging it off, the herd of gazelles stops, relaxes and goes back to grazing. The cat can

walk right through the herd and they won't flinch since his body language and mind set is telling them that he is now a non-attacking predator.

We are just like the gazelles, and similar to the cat after the kill, you humans have to continually prove to us that you are a non-attacking predator. The way you do that is to always be connected to us mentally. I think you refer to it as connection. If you give us your full attention, we will give you our full attention. You also must do everything around us in a predictable, relaxed, and non-threatening fashion, which means your body language is showing us that you are a non-attacking predator. The instant you tense up or raise the excitement level with us will result in us viewing you as an attacking predator and we will react accordingly.

So really it's pretty simple. Remember, I told you earlier, we learn and seek comfort on the thinking side of our brain vs. the reactive side of our brain. My advice to you is to always interact with our kind in a manner that puts us on the thinking vs. the reactive side of our brain. And the way you do that is to connect with us, and do everything around us in a predictable, relaxed, and non-threatening fashion. That way, we view you as a non-attacking predator.

I hope that helps you understand why training us with force is so counter productive.

Human:

I really do understand now. This is the first time it's been explained to me in a way that makes so much sense.

Horse:

Now let's talk Comfort: By nature, our species loves to seek comfort. We enjoy just grazing in a pasture, and not having any cares in the world. As I previously mentioned, we like being in the thinking side of our brain because it gives comfort to us. So when we are not threatened by a predator, we go along in life seeking comfort while in the thinking side of our brain. And the only interruption in this state of comfort is when we are moving away from pressures created by other horses or trusted humans to re-establish that state of comfort.

Let me give you an example: In addition to being prey animals, we are also herd animals. If you put ten of us in a pasture, we are all going to interact and figure out a hierarchy in the herd. Basically, if I turn out to be number five, I can bully horses six through ten, and I get bullied by horses one through four. So whether it is just two of us or a thousand of us, we establish a pecking order that goes all the way up to the alpha mare in the case of a wild herd. Anyway, as we interact with each other, the dominant one of us will put pressure on the less dominant one of us via body language. The less dominant will respond to that pressure and seek comfort. If one of my superiors wants to take my flake of hay, he simply puts pressures on me via his body language. He starts by just walking toward me. If I don't move, he lays his ears back. If I still don't move, he opens his mouth ready to bite. And if that doesn't work, he will wheel around and kick me. I learn pretty quickly that once he starts to move toward me, my

reward is to move away from the hay and seek comfort somewhere else.

This is just one example of how pressures between us in the herd work. We read each other's body language so well, that the same horse that moved me from my hay could stand right next to me with different body languages and I would not feel any pressure. So how can you humans use our instinct to seek comfort from pressures put on us from our peers in communicating with us? Again it's pretty simple.

Once we view you as a non-attacking predator, and we are working in the thinking side of our brain, you then want us to accept you as one of the herd. In addition to establishing leadership, which I will discuss below, the way we accept you as one of the herd is for you to apply appropriate pressures on us and to release those pressures at exactly the right moment so our reward is a state of comfort. The key is putting on the appropriate pressures, and the timing of releasing those pressures. Once you figure this out, you can get us to take any shape you want us to in a willing and relaxed fashion.

So to really explain this concept with a little different twist is to understand that the desired relationship between horse and human is that of a herd of two. As we discussed, according to the laws of the herd (the only rules we horses really understand), the hierarchy is linear, meaning each and every individual of the herd is either dominant over or subordinate to each and every other individual. Think of the horse-human relationship as a herd of two, and within that herd, one is dominant and one

is subordinate. Ideally from your standpoint, the human should be the dominate member, but frequently that is not the case.

Human:

Can you give us some ideas on how we can be viewed as the dominant member?

Horse:

Let me get a little more specific. Basically, the pecking order in the herd is established when the dominant horse controls the resources of the herd (food, water, shelter, other horses) and controls the space and actions of other individuals. So when working with us, it is critical to understand how your own actions can influence your position in relationship to dominance and subordination (boy that's a big word coming out of a horse's mouth).

For example, if you hand feed us treats, it causes us to think we are dominant because we control your actions by taking food away from you. It's important to think about action and reaction. If we make an action to which you react, we are in charge. If you make an action to which we react, you are in charge.

I hope this helps explain the best way to get us to do whatever you want in a willing and relaxed fashion.

Human:

Again, I have never had it explained to me this way. I knew pressures, and the release of a pressure were important, but now I see why.

Horse:

And finally, let's talk Leadership: In the wild, it's the alpha mare, not the stallion that we as herd members follow. Leadership in our species is a basic instinct that has helped us survive for centuries, and is still hard-wired

into us even though most of us don't exist in wild herds anymore. In a wild herd the alpha mare is at the top of the pecking order, and she is looked up to by all of the herd members for absolute leadership. If we sense danger, we look to the alpha mare for direction. If she runs off, we run off. If she stays relaxed we stay relaxed. She communicates via body language to the rest of the herd. We look to her for guidance and security.

This instinct is so strong it can be a powerful tool for a human to communicate with us if done correctly. Think about it, if you can get us to view you as our alpha mare, you accomplish two major things. First off, you have our full trust. This is huge in scary situations where we look to you for guidance instead of reacting and running off. Secondly, you have our respect, which means we are more willing to respond to the pressures you present us with in a willing and confident fashion. And to be honest with you, this forms a human horse bond that is real important to me, and should be real important to you as my leader and companion.

Human:

So how exactly do we get you to view us as the alpha mare/leader?

Horse:

As far as establishing this relationship, it's a combination of first being viewed as a non-attacking predator, and being accepted as the dominant one in the human horse relationship.

To then be viewed as the alpha mare/leader, let me explain it to you this way: Remember that the alpha mare controls the

actions of each herd member by using her body language, postures, and gestures to communicate with others. When her head is down in the grass and she is quietly munching, we herd mates are relaxed. When her head comes up, ears prick forward, and her muscles tighten, the rest of the herd know to prepare for flight. They will follow her anywhere on her signal. And at times, just to make sure we are all paying attention to her at a time of stress, she will periodically push us around so we are in the habit of responding to her.

So the key is to use your body language like the alpha mare to periodically remind us that you are in charge. You also need to practice the appropriate body language to keep us relaxed and feeling that the safest place to be is with you.

Human:

This really does make a lot of sense. Keeping you on the thinking side of your brain through body language and pressures obviously is what makes sense to you and is the most effective way to communicate and teach you what we want you to do. Knowing that safety, comfort, and leadership is so important to you really simplifies things for me. We have covered a lot so far, so I hope you're not too exhausted. Can you think of anything else that you want to share with us?

Horse:

You know there are four areas that I have not addressed that I think are well worth mentioning. Let me start with what I call our sixth sense. When I discussed our mental and physical capabilities, I intentionally omitted our sixth sense. This one is pretty hard to

explain but I will give it a shot anyway. It probably comes from our ability to sense the intentions of our predators, but we have the ability to sense your feelings. This may sound weird, but we are very sensitive to insecurity or confidence in humans that handle us, and respond accordingly. If you lack assurance, we feel insecure and perform well below our capability. Certainly your body language plays a big part, but believe me, we do have a sense for knowing what you're thinking and/or feeling.

Human:

I have never heard of this before, but if you say you have this sixth sense to know if we are confident or scared, regardless of our body language, I guess I believe you. What else were you going to mention?

Horse:

Let's talk about personality for a minute. Now that you know about our instinctual behavior, our mental and physical characteristics and what is most important to us—Safety, Comfort, and Leadership—you must recognize that no two horses are the same personality-wise. I will leave this for you to figure out, but let me give you a couple of clues. First off, if you take ten of us and put us together, we will establish a linear hierarchy like we previously discussed. Number one in the herd will be the most dominant, and number ten the most subordinate. How you humans interact with a number one personality vs. a number ten personality can be very different. So it is worth your time to figure out our personality based on where we fit into the hierarchy of the herd to be more successful with us.

And the second clue I would give you is that we have certain physical characteristics that can distinguish our personalities. They are not always perfect, but it's worth your time to determine what they are, and apply them to the individual horse you are looking to purchase or attempting to train.

Human:

You know there are trainers out there that talk about different personalities and how you should approach their training, but I have never heard it put this way as far as where they fit into the dynamics of the herd. Thanks for the clues, and yes, we will be discussing these concepts in our program. Anything else?

Horse:

The third thing I wanted to talk about is body language, both yours and ours. I told you that it is our primary means of communication with each other, so I think it would be worthwhile to maybe give you some more insight.

We communicate with our entire body from head to tail, with head position, ear position, facial expressions, feet, tail, mouth, teeth, and nose. We make communicative gestures, display body language that reveals our emotions, and we even have a few audible communications.

We employ many gestures that have meaning and we are quick to learn sign and body language from humans when you use it. We gesture in many ways, including pawing, which indicates frustration and desire to move, and bobbing our head to the ground, which means we are contrite and we are accepting subordination. Snaking is a gesture we make by lowering our head with nose pointed out and

teeth bared—a dominant herding behavior. Moving our hip in toward a threat or cocking a foot indicates we are becoming defensive and thinking about kicking. Tossing our head high with the nose moving in a circular motion is our defiant gesture—basically our way of flipping you off.

Reading our body language will also tell you a lot about our emotional state. We are really pretty emotional animals and one of the most sensitive animals in the animal kingdom. If we are relaxed and safe, we lower our head (the lower it goes the more relaxed we are), relax our ears, lick our lips, chew, drop our tail, and take a deep sigh. Any change in the elevation of our head downward indicates we are relaxing and any upward movement indicates tension. If we have a stiff tail pointed down but with the bottom of our tail bone sticking out between the tail hairs, that means we are in a transitional phase (unsure of our emotions, like when we are going from dominant to subordinate).

Human:

This is really helpful. Can you comment on our body language?

Horse:

Sure, we receive communication from you humans with your body language as well, whether you realize it or not. I know I am repeating myself, but the first step in controlling our actions is by you controlling your own body language. We notice your posture, eye contact, your foot movements, the elevation of your shoulders, the tone of your voice, and the rhythm of your breathing. So you have to be aware of the actions on your part and know

that you are constantly communicating with us through your body language.

Just a couple quick examples. If I take a step toward you and you back away, you have just told me I am in charge. If you get scared, tense your muscles, and hold your breath, I will mirror your actions and instantly become frightened. And if you are not alert and aware of what you are doing while you are working with me, I will know you are not in charge, and I will feel compelled to step into the leadership role.

Try this body language exercise next time I am tense and on the muscle. Stand next to me (or from the saddle) take a deep breath, and exhale with an audible sigh while allowing your shoulders, neck and head to drop. Most of the time I will mimic your behavior and sigh, drop my head lower, relax my muscles, and become calm and subordinate. Remember, we can relax in the presence of strong leadership. Knowing that we are being taken care of and will be safe and comfortable; that is why we gladly accept subordination.

Human:

Great stuff, what was the fourth thing you wanted to mention?

Horse:

Oh yeah, the forth thing goes back to how we think. Remember, if you teach us something on our right side, you can't expect that we learned it on both sides. Basically, you need to remember that you are training two horses. If you put pressure on us to disengage our hindquarters on the left side, you can't expect that we automatically learn it on our right side. Sorry, that's just the way we are wired.

Human:

Wow, this is really amazing information. With everything you have shared with us today, any final words of wisdom that kind of sum up things on understanding your language?

Horse:

Off the tip of my tongue, here is your quick answer: All of us horses, no matter how high in the hierarchy, will gratefully accept the leadership of another individual, as long as the leader has demonstrated his or her commitment to controlling and protecting the herd. For us to accept a human as a leader, that human must be able to control our space, maintain discipline in the herd and must never betray our trust by causing us fear or discomfort. And once we have accepted you as a leader, we will be relaxed, compliant, obedient, and happy. What more could you ask for?

Human:

That is some powerful wisdom, and something that most of us humans never quite understand. Anyway, thanks so much for your time, it's been great.

Horse:

You're welcome Mr. Human Horse Trainer.

The only thing that comes to mind in closing is to mention again that we, just like humans, are all individuals and have our own personalities. The difference is we gravitate to the instincts I have discussed, which is a real advantage as far as you understanding our language. I think it's also important to recognize that, unlike humans, we have no motives, and if you give us your heart we will give you ours, with no questions asked.

Human:

Thanks again!

Now that we have heard from the horse's perspective, I think it is pretty clear what is important to a horse, that being safety, comfort and leadership. We can now use that to our advantage as far as communicating in a language that they understand. And as the horse indicated to us, the language they understand is one of connection, body language and pressures. The next section will discuss these three principles in more detail so you have a better understanding of how they will be applied as we move up the training pyramid.

Enjoy the Ride!

Overview

Thanks to the interview we just had with a horse, we have a better understanding as to what is important to a horse, and how to communicate in a fashion that is horse sensible.

We now know that communicating through connection, predictability, relaxation, and in a non-threatening manner will allow the horse to view us as a non-attacking predator. This will allow him to stay on the thinking side of his brain.

We also learned that if we apply the appropriate pressures and the timing of the release of that pressure, we will have the horse viewing us as one of the herd. Again, this will

keep him on the thinking side of his brain.

And finally, we learned the power of being viewed as the alpha mare/leader by applying the appropriate pressures and releases. This allows the horse to trust and respect us.

So where do we go from here?

In the next three sections I will give you some specifics on how we apply these principles in general. Just remember that even though I have them in separate categories, they all three overlap. Also, don't get frustrated if I don't yet get specific. The specifics will come when we advance through each level of the training and riding pyramid.

Connection

Connection is a term I use that incorporates a lot of things. The main thing is to think of it as connecting with your horse mentally at all times. Think of it as an attitude you have whenever you are around your horse, as much as it is a technique for communicating with him on the ground or while mounted.

You start connecting with your horse from the first moment you interact with him. It might be walking down the barn aisle to his stall, or out in a field to catch him. You maintain that attitude all the while you are grooming, while you are saddling him up, and while you are working him, be it on the ground or under saddle.

And it's not over until it's over.

You maintain this attitude/connection while you remove the tack, cool him off, groom him again, and put him away.

Connection means that when you are with your horse you are with him at every moment and every step. You have to put your total attention and focus on the horse if you want him to give you his full attention.

That means you can't be standing there grooming him and shooting the bull with your friend. Or leading him around thinking about what you're going to have for dinner that night.

You have to be with your horse now, at this moment. You have to be with him stride by stride by stride, whether you're leading him or riding him.

So when you're working with your horse you always give him your full attention now, now, and now.

Connection is powerful, but hard for people to practice. It's a practice that is well worth the effort, though, and will really pay off by keeping your horse connected to you.

At the same time you are practicing connection with your horse, you also need to incorporate these important practices that also help keep your horse connected to you.

They are:

Predictability

Do everything possible to be predictable in your movements so you don't push your horse to thinking on the reactive side of his brain.

Relaxation

Work on relaxation by practicing breathing with your horse. As the horse told us in the interview, they view the cat as a non-attacking predator when they see that his breathing has relaxed. Staying relaxed means that you are always in an emotional neutral state.

Think about it. If you are with a bunch of little kids in a thunderstorm, and you tense up and are scared, the kids will be just as scared because they are watching your reactions. If, on the other hand, you are relaxed, giving them the impression that it's no big deal, then they will relax and follow your lead.

Rhythm

A steady, uninterrupted rhythm has an element of predictability to it. That's important

because as we learned earlier, horses thrive on predictability. When we are always working rhythmically with our horses, they begin to trust that nothing abrupt or startling is going to happen.

A trainer with a good sense of rhythm will walk, turn, and stop to a steady beat. He or she will maintain a sense of rhythm as they catch their horse, pat him, and lead him to the barn. Just watch the blissful expression on the face of a horse being groomed by a groom wielding curries and brushes to a steady inner beat, and you will see the power of rhythm.

This is the concept I learned from Robert the Ballroom Dancer and, believe me, it really works.

In order to develop a good sense of rhythm, you must concentrate through connection. To make it an ingrained habit, you must pay attention to the beat of your walk, the pattern of your breathing and the swing of your knees, your hips, and shoulders.

You can't multi-task and be thinking about what movie you're going to watch that evening, or talking to a friend at the same time that you are leading your horse or grooming him, or even standing and waiting with him. You have

to keep your attention on your horse and your rhythm relationship with him.

So how do you get started?

In the beginning, don't be afraid to count the beat or to hum or sing to help you find a steady rhythm on the ground or in the saddle. Singing or humming is one of the things you can do to feel rhythm and to help you relax when you are nervous. Eventually you will develop an inner sense of a steady beat as a habit.

Remember, rhythm is a powerful training and riding tool. It helps riders communicate more clearly with their horse through their aids, which we will talk about a little later.

The horse that is always ridden rhythmically begins to seek out and pick up on its rider's rhythm. It learns to mirror that rhythm. When the rider's joints move in a specific "walk," "trot," or "lope" rhythm, the horse feels that rhythm or beat and responds in a way that matches it

A common theme in my program is to constantly practice these important principles, so you will be learning a lot more about Connection, Predictability, Relaxation, and Rhythm as you progress through the program.

Body Language

As we learned in the horse interview, getting the horse to view you as one of the herd, and the alpha mare/leader, is dependent on your ability to communicate via body language.

We will discuss psychological and physical pressures in the next section, but suffice it to say that we put many of these pressures on the horse via our body language.

Body language is powerful stuff and includes connection, predictability, relaxation and rhythm, principles we just discussed.

As we also learned from the horse, they are so sensitive that they know how we are breathing, what we are thinking, whether we're scared or uptight, where our eyes are focused, or simply if

we are moving in an attacking or non-attacking predator mode.

As we go through the program, I will teach you the specific body language to put certain pressures on a horse. The key thing to remember is that a horse is so sensitive, your body language is a major communicator to him, and a major determinant as to whether he is working in the reactive or thinking side of his brain.

Never lose sight of the fact that body language is one of the major ways horses communicate, and we have to focus a lot of attention in this area to be successful with our horse.

Pressures

This is where things get a little more complicated, but again, don't worry. This is an area that takes most people a lifetime to master, but even a novice willing to learn can be very successful.

Basically, we use pressures to shape a horse's behavior. We learned from the horse interview that horses communicate via body language and pressures. Many people don't realize that to use pressures effectively, and keep the horse on the thinking side of his brain, the pressure must:

1. Not be perceived as an attack;
2. Be only one step away from something the horse already understands, and;
3. Relieved when the horse does the right thing, which is the reward to the horse.

When we apply a pressure with all three of these things in place, the horse will be working on the thinking side of his brain. He will then accept the pressure in a comfortable fashion and learn from it.

Very simply, it will be horse sensible.

The mistake most people make is that they don't know how to link the things a horse needs to learn in a horse sensible sequence. Or, said another way, they have a hard time breaking down pressures into small building blocks to help the horse learn one by one.

Just like I did with the colt in front of Heidi, I put pressure on the horse to do something, to create a particular shape before the horse understood all the baby steps to get there.

That is exactly why my program helps you

and your horse advance in baby steps.

So let's get a little more specific.

We use both physical and psychological pressures to shape a horse and his behavior.

Let's take an example of a green colt that doesn't know a whole lot. As he moves from being a green colt to a finished horse, his understanding of particular physical pressures becomes much more sophisticated. Eventually he will learn to understand a whole sequence of physical pressures put together to shape him into a complex movement.

Think of it as putting a bunch of words together to make a sentence. The sentence has a lot more meaning compared to the individual words if they were used alone.

So in the beginning, the green colt's vocabulary of physical pressures is very limited. If we throw a bunch of physical pressures at him all at once, he is going to feel attacked.

That's why the old cowboy way of breaking colts (snub 'em, saddle 'em up, jump on and let 'em buck) does not work real well.

So when we first start with this colt, we begin with connection, and spend a lot of time getting the horse to trust us, and convincing him that we are part of the herd, and not a predator.

Again, in addition to practicing connection, we are working on rhythm, relaxation, and predictability.

We begin to shape the horse's behavior using our own body language while he is in a round pen or an arena.

We use our movement and body language to put psychological pressure on the horse to get him to move in a certain direction at a certain speed. As we shape his activity, we are careful never to push the horse so far out of his psychological comfort zone that we scare him.

And we are careful never to raise his excitement level to the point where he loses rhythm, relaxation, and his awareness of us.

That's why when I see someone running a horse around in a round pen, snapping a whip, I just shake my head in amazement.

Oh well, different strokes for different folks.

As the colt's understanding of our program grows, we move alongside him and begin to ask more of him, and make things a little more challenging.

We walk, trot, back, stop, and change directions. And our goal all this time is still trust and awareness with rhythm and relaxation.

Then, very gradually, we will introduce hobbles, tack, put someone on his back, get him used to carrying that someone, and how their weight affects his balance. We then will begin to use what I call directional pressures, which are seat, leg, and rein aids to ask him for the shapes we want.

All of these steps mean introducing physical pressures.

Directional pressures, as I mentioned above, are the ones we apply with our seat, leg, and reins. With these pressures, we want the horse to learn that when he moves away from these pressures in the direction we want, the pressure goes away, and that is his reward.

It's also important to remember that the

pressure of the cinch, or the feel of the stirrups at his side are physical pressures that we want him to accept and ignore. As a result, we have to introduce these pressures very slowly and in a manner in which the horse accepts them without thinking he has to do something to find the release and reward by getting comfortable.

Before I move to the next section to discuss riding aids, I want to take a little more time to discuss pressures since the concept is so important to your success.

Here goes:

Many trainers attack horses. They think that if the horse's activity level increases, the horse is learning more. Plus, it's a lot more impressive to watch for most people who don't understand effective horse training.

In reality, when a horse feels attacked, you have created a reactive situation whereby the horse is thinking entirely on the reactive side of its brain. Reactive situations create five times as strong a reaction as situations when the horse is working on the thinking side of his brain.

What that means is, if you create a pressure that the horse reacts to, you create five times as much negative feeling as you do with a pressure applied when a horse is working on the thinking side of its brain.

Think about that for a moment.

So when most people come to the end of their knowledge on how to enforce training positively, they often resort to reactive pressures like yanking on the lead shank, smacking him with the end of the rope, or jabbing him with their spurs.

Not very productive is it?

And that's why we break down pressures in

FOUNDATIONS—APPLYING THE LANGUAGE

a horse sensible sequence and introduce them to the horse in baby steps.

That's the heart of our program, giving you knowledge to make this happen.

And one last point is how quickly you apply a pressure, where you apply it and how hard you hold it will tell your horse how he needs to respond. And as soon as he responds, you reward by taking the pressure away. The greatest

reward to the horse is the release of pressure (always) so he gets that comfort feeling that the horse in our interview described.

So you apply pressure in a horse sensible fashion that causes the horse to act the way you want, and then you release the pressure as a reward. Then you do it again until the horse's response to that pressure becomes a habit.

See? That's not so difficult after all.

Aids

Basically, aids are the term that we use to describe physical pressures that a rider uses to communicate with a horse. I like to refer to them as directional pressures since they basically are pressures we use to direct the horse.

I'll walk you through a discussion of what we call the natural aids, and the artificial aids. So consistent with what I have been telling you about pressures, when the horse responds correctly to the pressure, the pressure goes away. A correct response rewards the horse.

To reinforce what we talked about earlier, it will help you if you think of individual aid pressures as words that have a specific meaning to a horse, like turn right, turn left, or advance from a trot to a lope.

As both the horse and rider progress up our training pyramid, they begin to combine several aids into sentences that have more meaning than just a single word, like get ready to lope after we make this roll back to the left, or get ready for a flying lead change.

And remember that we do this very gradually in baby steps both for the horse and rider.

Remember my story about Clem the Pickup Man? We talked about trick horses, and aids vs. cues.

Let's talk more about that since most people don't recognize the difference.

Aids are not the same as cues. If a horse responds to voice commands or to a click to go into a trot, or if he responds to a bump to go into a lope, he is responding to conditioned cues.

Nothing wrong with it, but it's just a different communication system.

The only problem with communicating with cues is that the horse and rider are communicating with a very limited vocabulary.

On the other hand, if horse and rider are communicating with aids, they are working with a much larger vocabulary with many degrees of meaning. Importantly, if you want to take your horse to the upper levels in any discipline, you need this larger vocabulary.

Hopefully this clears up any confusion between cues and aids.

Okay, let's start with what we call the three natural aids, which consist of the seat or weight aids, the legs, and the rein or hand aids.

We combine these aids into what I call a sequence of pressures that the horse responds to by taking the shape we want him to take.

Importantly, since we can vary the pressure of any of these three aids, an experienced rider can apply them with a lot of feel, or degrees of meaning, resulting in the ability to communicate many variations of shape to the horse.

This is kind of a mouthful, but what I am really saying is that using these three aids and pressures in varying degrees is how we get a horse to become a great dance partner, and ultimately how we become one with our horse.

I will get into more detail as we go through each step within the various levels of the training and riding pyramid. So for now I will give you a general description of how we use the three

natural aids. Note that I am discussing them in this order, Seat, Leg, and Rein aids. I do so because this is the order that I teach them to the horse.

Most people get on a horse and communicate via their reins and feet. My training program emphasizes teaching the horse and rider the seat aids first, leg aids second, and rein aids last.

Weight or Seat Aids

Remember how the horse told us that they are so sensitive they can feel a fly on their back? So if they are that sensitive, they can surely feel the pressure of our weight in the saddle, and with practice they can learn that only very subtle weight shifts have specific meaning.

We keep it pretty simple in our program, and teach three bilateral weight positions and two unilateral weight positions.

The three unilateral positions (both sit bones used together) are the primary pressures for start stop, and every speed in between, which is what we call rate. The two unilateral pressures applied by our two sit bones are the primary pressures shaping the horse's movement sideways, like disengaging the hindquarters, or moving its front end.

At first we exaggerate these seat pressures to teach the horse. Then, when both rider and horse are advanced, the movements are so subtle they are hard to recognize.

Leg Aids

As with the seat aids, we keep it pretty simple, and teach three leg positions. And just like the seat pressures, when the horse and rider are advanced, the positions are very subtle. When

we use both legs at the same time we call it a bilateral leg aid, and when only one leg is actively pressing we call it a unilateral leg aid.

Bilateral leg pressures are used with the seat aids to do everything having to do with forward motion, like changing gates, collection, and shaping the bend of the horse in circles. Unilateral leg aids are used with the seat aids to do things like taking leads, moving a horse's front end, moving from a large to smaller circle, or doing a side pass.

Rein or Hand Aids

Our program utilizes the O-ring snaffle for starting and schooling a horse. In addition, we incorporate a series of bits to advance a horse to a high port spade bit. We also emphasize putting a neck rein on a horse. Our western method is in contrast to the English method that is full contact using variations of a snaffle bit. In addition, the English method does not incorporate neck reining.

With that said, the western and English methods accomplish the same thing, but just do it in a different way. Our goal is to develop very light hands and communicate with our reins in a very subtle fashion.

Basically, we want to use the rein aids to help a horse follow his nose. Ultimately we want the horse's body to follow his nose in many of the shapes that we ask of him.

We also use the rein aids in addition to seat and leg pressures for everything from turning to collection.

Again, this is a very general description, and we will get specific on how these pressures are used in the various levels of the pyramid. Now

let's discuss the artificial aids, which are the whip, spurs, and voice.

Whips and spurs are misunderstood inside and outside the horse industry. When they are used to reinforce the leg aids, there is nothing abusive about them, as long as they are used correctly. They simply just add another shade of meaning.

In that regard, the timing of their use is critical.

When training a horse, you take him through the steps, first showing him what you want, and then we ask him for what we want. Once he has figured out these first two steps, we can use our natural aids to tell him what we want.

When we are sure the horse understands what we are telling him, but he decides to ignore our request, then it is appropriate to reinforce your natural leg aid with a tap of the whip or touch of a spur.

Either one should be used with a degree of pressure that does not scare the horse or raise his level of excitement. If we use whips and spurs in this fashion, they are not considered punishment by the horse. They are just another shade of meaning added to the pressures they already understand, which is horse sensible to them.

Unfortunately, many people use whips and spurs as their primary pressure, which is, as we

have just discussed, the wrong thing to do.

Like I have been saying previously, we use the sequence of aid pressures to create the feeling of shapes we want our horse to take.

It is important to understand, however, that a constant pressure goes away and the horse will then ignore it.

Remember when we discussed the pressure of the cinch? Once a horse gets used to it, then they ignore it.

We have to be careful because the same thing can happen with any of our natural aids.

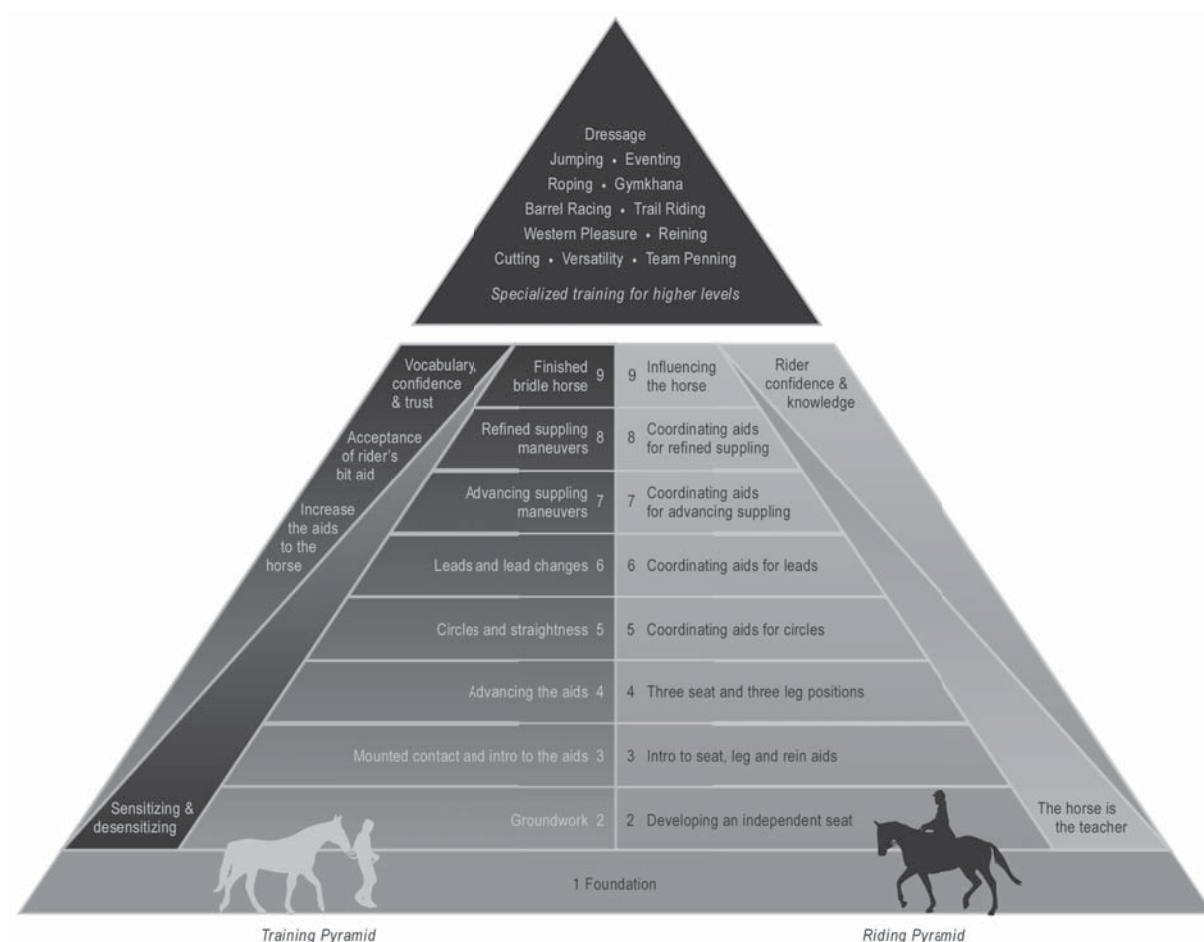
If a rider inadvertently applies constant pressure with their weight, leg, or rein because they are out of balance or unable to control their body's movement in some way, the horse soon learns to ignore the pressure.

That's why the development of an independent seat through relaxation, balance, and an ability to follow the horse's motion is critical to proper application of the aids.

And oh, by the way, that's why developing an independent seat is the first thing we emphasize and teach in our riding pyramid.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the language of the horse, and how we apply the language of the horse to be successful, the next section provides you with a summary of how these principles are incorporated in our training and riding pyramid.

The Training and Riding Pyramid



It's no surprise that horses are not born knowing how to be reining horses or dressage horses. We train horses to basically play the games we humans invent like those that are listed at the top of the pyramid titled Specialized Training for Higher Levels.

To get our horses to the higher levels, we start with the horse's inborn mental and physical abilities. Then we gradually apply pressures to shape his behavior so he uses his physical abilities in specific ways that we want, which means we need to condition his body along

with his mind.

In order to reach your goal of playing a specific game with your horse, you need to have some kind of plan for how you're going to take the horse from raw material to finished partner. A lot of people search for a one-size-fits-all lesson plan that guarantees good results if they just follow all the steps. Unfortunately, there is no single lesson plan or training recipe that fits every horse.

First off, every horse has his own timetable. The horse's age and health, his temperament, his current physical condition, his genetic athletic potential, and his past experiences all figure in to how long it's going to take to train him to a certain level. He may progress faster or slower than you expect, so if you plan to teach the horse specific things by exact deadlines, you're just asking for problems.

Lesson plans get complicated because the horse has to develop simultaneously both mentally and physically. You as the trainer must decide where the horse is both mentally and physically every day. Then you can decide what that day's lesson plan should be to keep the horse progressing so the mental and physical aspects stay balanced.

When developing the training and riding pyramid, I did so knowing that everybody's goal is different. Some of you are happy to just feel confident doing groundwork with your horse, while others may want a safe horse you can do trail rides on. And then there are some of you who want to advance both you and your horse to the top of the pyramid, and play one or more of the games at higher levels.

No matter what your goals are, the

important thing is that our program gives you the knowledge and a road map to enhance your chances of success. Each level within the pyramid has specific baby steps for you to follow. Your level of commitment and your horse will dictate how and at what pace you will progress.

The key to our program is that you and your horse learn in baby steps, and it incorporates the language of the horse. In general, here is how it works. (Please refer to this Training and Riding Pyramid as you read about each level.)

The Training Side of the Pyramid:

Level 2—Groundwork:

This is where we start working on the basics of connection, rhythm, relaxation, body language, and introducing both psychological and physical pressures. We are also working on earning the horse's trust and respect.

Level 3—Mounted Contact and Introduction to the Aids:

We build on what the horse has learned in Level 2 and start introducing the natural aids beginning in word form. Here we are introducing the seat, leg, and rein aids one at a time so in the next level we can start combining them in sentence form.

Level 4—Advancing the Aids:

This is where we put the individual aid pressures we taught in Level 3 and put them together in sentences to ask for more advanced shapes than what have previously been asked. Importantly, for many of you, advancing through this level will be very rewarding and may be as far as you advance to meet your goals.

Level 5—Circles & Straightness;

Level 6—Leads & Lead Changes;

Level 7—Advancing Suppling Maneuvers, and;

Level 8—Refined Suppling Maneuvers:

As you advance through these levels, the shapes we ask of the horse become increasingly more complicated. We ask for these shapes by building on the sentences of pressures we taught earlier and advancing to more complicated sequences of pressures.

Level 9—Finished Bridle Horse:

At this level, the horse anticipates the shape you want when you just begin to apply the full sequence of aids. The horse that picks up a canter when he just feels your outside leg move back is an example. This is a different kind of understanding on the horse's part than just teaching him to associate a cue or signal with the movement you want. At this point the horse is fully trained, and carrying a high port spade bit is like its power steering. He's a broke horse, and your finished dance partner.

The Riding Side of the Pyramid:

Level 2—Developing an Independent Seat:

To effectively teach and use the aid pressures in the training pyramid, you as the rider have to be balanced in the saddle. Many people fail to recognize how their lack of balance in the saddle can affect how the horse moves and how they understand the aids being applied. It's important that you work on developing an independent seat before you advance. This section starts by showing you individual exercises you can work on to build your core and leg muscles. It also

gives you a sequence of exercises you can work on that will lead to an independent seat.

Levels 3—9:

These levels correspond with the training side levels and will detail how to apply the aid pressures effectively, and will trouble-shoot common problems. In addition, we will work on rein management for each level as new bits are introduced as we move up the pyramid.

Okay, that's a review of the hows and whys of the levels within the training and riding pyramid. Now, just a few additional comments before we move on.

No matter what you or your horse's experience, when you start the program, each and every one of you should start with step one and not skip any steps. If you do skip steps as you move through the program, you are failing to teach in baby steps, and in the case of a previously trained horse, failing to take the opportunity to find holes in his training.

So in a sense, I guess my program is a one-size-fits-all lesson plan for mentally conditioning your horse. The application of the lesson plan for your horse each day ends up being the last baby step he understands, and has mastered, and moving on to the next baby step that is only one step beyond what he already knows. This progression is horse sensible.

Now that you have a good feel for how our program incorporates the language of the horse, and how to apply that language, the next section is simply a dictionary of horse sensible terms for your review and future reference.

Terms, Concepts and Definitions

The following are terms, concepts and definitions that are considered Horse Sensible and are the foundation of our program. I recommend that you review these terms every now and then so that you don't forget them, and they become part of your everyday thinking when you are interacting with your horse. Remember, you will get out of our program what you put into it. Good Luck!

A Practical Program that is Focused on Teaching People to be Successful with Their Horses: (Dave) The Horse Sensible Horsemanship Program.

Aids: (Clem) The term used to describe physical pressures that a rider uses to communicate with a horse. I like to call them directional pressures since they are used to direct the horse. There are two kinds of aids, natural (seat, leg, and rein), and artificial (whip and spurs). We start by teaching with an aid as a word. We then combine the aids, words, to make a sentence, and then we advance the combination of sentences to form sequences of aids that we use to create the shapes we desire in a horse. Communicating with aids has a much larger vocabulary and degree of meaning as compared to cues, which have a limited vocabulary.

Alpha Mare: (Colonel) In a herd of horses, the alpha mare is at the top of the pecking order and is looked upon by the rest of the herd as the leader. The herd follows the lead of the alpha mare for survival.

Bitting Up Exercises: (Benny) Exercises our program uses to allow the horse to accept bit aids in a manner that the horse thinks it's his idea.

Body Language: (Colonel) The primary means of communication between horses, in addition to pressures they put on each other. These are primary ways that humans can effectively communicate with horses.

Breathing With Your Horse: (Hank, Benny) If you learn to breathe easy with your horse, you are practicing relaxation, which, combined with practicing rhythm and connection, will enhance your success with horses.

Buying a Horse for Looks Rather than for What's Between His Ears, is a Very Common Mistake that People Come to Regret Later On: (Merle) People lacking the appropriate knowledge are drawn to the looks of a horse ahead of his disposition. Certainly looks and confirmation are important if you plan on going on the show circuit, however, for the majority of horse enthusiasts, disposition, experience, and knowledge should come before looks when buying a horse.

Clean Slate: (Pres) A horse that has had little to no interaction with a human is a clean slate. They are the perfect partner for the knowledgeable trainer to train since they have not yet been taught any negative behavior by a trainer lacking knowledge.

Connection: (Hank) Means connecting with your horse mentally at all times. Think of it as

an attitude you have whenever you are around your horse. You have to put your full attention and focus on the horse at all times if you want him to give you his full attention.

Cues: (Clem) Conditioned responses that have a limited vocabulary vs. communication with aids, which have a greater vocabulary and varying degrees of meaning.

Dance Partners: (Clem) Ultimately we want our horse to take the shapes we ask for much the same as a good dance partner. The more advanced we become, the more our dance partner anticipates every move we are asking for.

Don't Get in the Way of the Horse: (Benny, Ray, and Mel) When most people are training a horse, they get all caught up in their agenda and get in the way of the horse. You will be more successful if you set the horse up to do what you are asking, then let him figure it out by staying out of his way.

Developing a Good Sense of Rhythm Requires Concentration: (Robert) To be successful at always working in a rhythmic fashion with our horse, we have to concentrate on doing so whenever we are interacting with our horse.

Emotional Neutral Training: (Jim) When working with your horse, you should always do everything with him in an emotionally neutral state. If you raise your emotions you will push him over to his reactive side of the brain, which is counter productive in training a horse.

Give Him a Job: (Jim, Mel) Horses, like humans, can get bored very easily. When training horses, always mix things up to keep them interested. This will keep them engaged

on the thinking side of their brain.

Good Horse Training is Boring to Watch: (Benny) A good horse trainer introduces pressures in baby steps to get the response and shapes he desires from the horse. These baby steps are so subtle that most people watching don't even pick up on them. That is the sign of a good horse trainer.

Have a Plan, But Be Flexible Enough to Go With the Flow: (Mel) Just like our program, it is a road map for you to follow, but remember, there is never a one-size-fits-all. Every horse is different, and you must be flexible each and every day with your horse's training. He will tell you where he is at, and it's your job to listen to him and go with the flow.

Heart to Heart: (Benny, Ray) One of the secrets to being successful with your horse is practicing connection at all times, which includes giving your heart to your horse who, in return, will give you his heart. Unfortunately, most people just don't get this concept.

Herd Dynamics: (Colonel) Horses are prey animals that exist in herds. Every member of the herd establishes a pecking order within that herd. In the wild, the alpha mare is at the top of the pecking order and is looked up to by the rest of the herd for leadership. Herds of horses communicate between each other via body language and pressures put on one another.

Hobble Training for Leadership: (Benny) Having our horse view us as the alpha mare is one of our primary objectives in training horses. The practice of hobbling a horse early in the training process and continuing to hobble your horse while tied will instill

leadership, patience, and trust.

Horse's Adhere to Three Primary Instincts, Safety, Comfort, and Leadership: (Horse)

We use these three instincts to effectively understand and communicate with horses. As humans, we want to be viewed as a non-attacking predator, a member of the herd, and the alpha mare of the herd.

Horse and Rider are Like Dance Partners, and the Interplay Between Horse and Rider Can Only Be as Good as the Highest Level that the Least Experienced of the Two has Achieved: (Robert)

What this means is, a finished horse and an experienced rider are great dance partners because they both have the knowledge and feel to move as one. On the other hand, you can't expect a green horse and an experienced rider to be great dance partners, or even worse, a green horse and an inexperienced rider. You just can't cheat the system. It takes time for a horse to become knowledgeable and finished, and it takes time for a rider to become knowledgeable and learn feel.

Horses are the Most Honest Creatures on Earth (Without Motive): (Pres)

Horses, unlike humans, have no motives. They adhere to their instincts for safety, comfort, and leadership. If you give them your heart, they will give you theirs.

Horses Are Very Sensitive Both Physically and Mentally: (Horse)

They have a sixth sense whereby they can read the minds of potential predators. Their sense of sight, smell, and feelings on their hide are far superior to humans.

Horse's Burn Out Just Like People: (Mel)

If you push horses too fast they can burn out just like people. That's why you mix things up, give them a job, and listen to what they are telling you about their training.

Horses Learn by Repetition. Unfortunately, Repeating the Same Bad Habits Results in Learned Bad Habit Behavior: (Halbert)

Always be consistent with your training with attention to details when doing anything with your horse. Once a horse learns the wrong thing, it takes time to correct the problem, and sometimes you may never get it corrected.

Horses Learn When a Pressure is Not Perceived as an Attack, the Pressure is Only One Step Away From Something the Horse Already Understands, and if Doing the Correct Thing Relieves the Pressure, that's the Reward to the Horse: (Heidi)

Remember, the timing of the release is very important in this process.

Horses Think in the Here and Now: (Horse)

They don't think about the past or what they are going to do tomorrow. They also have excellent memories.

Horses Think on Two Sides of Their Brain:

(Horse) They have the reactive side of the brain where they react by instincts. They cannot learn or pay attention to you when they are thinking on their reactive side. The thinking side of their brain is the part of their brain where they are comfortable and non-threatened. This is the side of the brain where they give us their attention and are open to learning from us.

Human Error: (Pres) Horses have no concept of what is right or wrong in the eyes of a human. As a result, problems in horses are a result of human error in their previous training.

Independent Seat: (Heidi) In order not to confuse the horse when attempting to shape him with the appropriate aids, you must develop an independent seat.

It's Not a Contest: (Benny) Many people train horses through force and intimidation. They let human nature take over and make it a contest between human and horse, the human not wanting to be bested by the horse. This approach is counterproductive.

Laying a Horse Down to Establish Leadership & Respect: (Gus) In certain cases, laying a horse down in addition to hobble training is an excellent way to gain its trust and respect as well as establish leadership. Importantly, this has to be done in a non threatening fashion.

Make it the Horse's Idea: (Benny, Ray) When we are teaching anything to a horse, he will learn much more quickly if you present it in a fashion that he thinks the shape you want him to take is his idea.

Nagality: (Colonel) This is the term the Colonel used to describe personalities in horses. Horses are individuals, and they have their own nagalities. Understanding your horse's nagality will enhance your ability to successfully communicate with him.

Never a Cheap Shot: (Jim) A cheap shot is an example of a reactive pressure a person that has run out of knowledge and patience uses on a horse. It is counterproductive and pushes the horse to think on the reactive side of his brain.

Never Forget That it's the Little Things That Count: (Halbert) Horses learn by repetition and they don't know right from wrong. It's easy to get lazy and take short cuts with the mundane

things when handling your horse. Making sure you are consistent with your attention to detail will minimize the chances of your horse learning bad habits.

Never One Step More Than He Already Knows: (Jim) We can effectively communicate with horses using pressures to create the shapes we want them to take. When we are teaching these pressures we never want to introduce a pressure that is more than one step beyond what he already understands. That's why we introduce pressures in baby steps.

Not Today, Not Tomorrow, Not Ever: (Jim) We never want to use force or punishment to communicate with a horse. Anything that raises his excitement and pushes him to view us as an attacking predator is counterproductive.

Predictability: (Hank) Horses love predictability. You should always interact with your horse in a rhythmic and predictable manner to keep him on the thinking side of his brain.

Pressures and Aids is the Language that Makes Sense to the Horse: (Heidi) Since horses communicate with each other using pressures, it only makes sense that we can communicate with them using pressures and the appropriate release of those pressures to get them to take the shapes we desire.

Putting a Rider with a Minimal Vocabulary of Horse Sensible Knowledge with a Horse that has a Minimal Vocabulary of Pressures and Aids is Simply a Recipe for Disaster: (Merle)

You have to be realistic with your knowledge and abilities and how they match up with the horse you are interacting with. Many people purchase a young green horse with

the intention of learning together. This union rarely results in confidence or success.

Ray: It doesn't have to be a struggle. You are dealing with a 1,000 pound plus animal and you are not going to win by using force. You must work with the horse's mind. It goes from your hands to their minds to their feet. You control their feet through your mind. In order to work with horses' minds, however, you have to really understand their mind. You have to make the right thing easy and the wrong thing difficult. That is the essence of feel. You have to understand things from the horse's point of view and then let your idea become their idea. Then you will get everything you ask for.

Ray: We can all get along together if we try to understand one another. You will meet a lot of people and have a lot of acquaintances, but as far as having friends, they are rare and very precious. But every horse you ride can be your friend because you ask this of them. This is real important. You can ask the horse to do your thing, but you ASK him, you offer it to him in a good way. You fix it up and let him find it. You do not make anything happen, no more than you make a friendship happen.

Reward for Even the Slightest of Try: (Benny, Ray) If you reward a horse for even the slightest try, he will learn much more quickly since you are rewarding him with comfort for doing the right thing in baby steps. Remember, it's the timing of the release of pressure that is so important.

Relaxation: (Hank, Robert) Always work in a relaxed state with your horse. Concentrate on relaxed breathing. Being relaxed helps a horse view us as a non-attacking predator.

Rhythm: (Hank, Robert) Always practice rhythm with your horse. A steady uninterrupted rhythm has an element of predictability to it. When we work in rhythm with our horse he begins to trust that nothing abrupt or startling is going to happen.

Rhythm Helps Riders Communicate More Clearly with Their Horse through Their Aids: (Robert) When you are riding rhythmically with your horse, he comes to expect it, and will become more responsive to our riding aids.

The Fastest Way to Train a Horse, or Fix a Problem Horse is to Go Slow: (Mel) Remember, horses should never be asked to do anything that is more than one step beyond what they already know, and that they learn in baby steps. Anything beyond that will be viewed as an attack on them, which is counter-productive.

The Human is Full of Opinions, But the Horse is the Truth: (Ray) Everyone that interacts with horses, including myself, has his or her own opinion on how to be successful with horses. However, those of us who strive to understand and listen to the horse will be the most successful.

The Right Thing Easy, and the Wrong Thing Not So Easy: (Jim) Horses have no concept of right from wrong. The most effective way to teach a horse is to make the right thing easy and the wrong thing not so easy, while never using punishment or force in the process.

Thinking in the Here and Now: (Jim) Horses are different than humans in that they think in the here and now. They don't think about things in the future or in the past. At all times

they are thinking either on the reactive or thinking side of their brain. We want to keep them in the thinking side of the brain during our interactions with them since that is where we get their full attention.

To Be Successful, You Have to Take the Time to Read and Understand the Personality of Your Horse. Use His Strengths and Weaknesses to Your Advantage: (Mel) Take the time to understand your horses's personality, and figure out how you approach its training accordingly. How we work with a strong-willed alpha-type mare is very different from a timid gelding that is at the bottom of the pecking order.

Training Horses Involves Using Pressures to Shape a Horse's Behavior: (Heidi) Since horses use body language and pressures to communicate with each other, the most effective way to train horses is by using pressures that they understand.

Train Them Inside and Outside: (Jim) Much the same as giving a horse a job, you need to keep his training interesting to him by mixing things up. Work on things in the arena one day, then work outside the next. This will keep his mind clear, and more open to learning new things.

Trick Horses: (Clem) This is a term to used describe a horse that understands and responds to conditioned cues that have a very limited vocabulary. On the other hand, if horse and

rider are communicating with aids, they are working with a much larger vocabulary with many degrees of meaning. This larger vocabulary is necessary if you take a horse to upper levels in any discipline.

Watching for Expression in Your Horse: (Benny) A big part of connection is thinking about and watching your horse's actions at all times. His body language will communicate to you what he is thinking. By learning the body language of the horse we can understand his thinking. Examples are the placement of his ears, how he is breathing, whether his muscles are tense, what his eyes look like, or what he is doing with his tail. This takes experience, but is well worth the effort.

When you Have a Problem with a Horse you Need to Look at What Happened Before What Happened, Happened. This is Basic to Trying to Understand the Horse. We are the Teacher, but Learn the Most by Listening to the Horse: (Ray) This all goes back to learning and doing things in baby steps. By listening to the horse, he is going to tell us in baby steps why he did something, whether it is the right or wrong thing.

Your Horse's Behavior is a Reflection of Your Training. Many People Make Up for their Lack of Commitment, Knowledge and Ability by Making Excuses for their Horse's Behavior: (Halbert) This one really is self explanatory.

Nagality

When you really step back and figure out what makes a great horseman so great that one trait stands out, you'll see that it's his or her ability to read horses. And the way they learn to read horses is by coming in contact with a lot of horses over their lifetime and career.

The Colonel and Pres Houtchens, who I described in my stories, were two of these great horsemen that had a true ability to read and understand horses.

The Colonel termed horse psychology as nagality, which is the term that has stuck with me over the years, and the term I use in my program to describe horse psychology.

Most of you will never have the opportunity to work with many horses to allow you to effectively read horses. That's okay, because our video program will expose you to many horses and training situations that will certainly help you. In addition, if you take the time to study this section that I call Nagality, your ability to read the horses you come in contact with will be enhanced.

So before I get started, let me give you some thoughts on why this section is so important.

Most horse trainers often distill his or her influences and experiences into a signature horse handling approach, a philosophy that is applied across the board to every horse in their stable. In contrast, if you contemplate the nagalities of the horses you are in charge of, and brainstorm ways in which each horse's training program may be tailored to fit its individual nature, that's the key to being even more successful.

You may be scratching your head,

wondering how all this works with our training pyramid. Remember, I said that my program is a one-size-fits-all lesson plan from the standpoint that we progress in baby steps, and once a baby step is mastered, the next baby step can be introduced.

That's not to say you approach each and every horse the same as you progress in the program. So what we want to do is use the program as a road map, and use it to tailor a training program for each and every horse we are training.

Remember, at times we must think of ourselves as nagality specialists, rather than horse trainers. A horse has to be on the thinking side of his brain to accept training. There's many ways to get them in that state of mind that we have already discussed. But you will find that you have to be tough with some (not crossing the line as a predator), easier with others, slow with some, and faster with others.

The key is knowing the when and how.

To hopefully make this more Horse Sensible to you, I have broken this discussion into three sections. They are:

1. Herd Hierarchy and Nagality Characteristics.
2. Determining Nagalities by Physical Characteristics.
3. Tailoring Communication & Training Methods to Fit Specific Nagalities.

Also, to assist you in learning these concepts, I have used some visuals that will hopefully help.

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: NAGALITY

HERD NAGALITY CHART

General Characteristics	General Nagality Traits	Specific Nagality Traits	Desireable Nagality Traits	Specific Nagality Traits	General Nagality Traits	General Characteristics
The Submissive Hot Rod			The Dominant Boss			
Nervous	High Energy Runner Very Quick	High Headed Antsy Impulsive Very Alert Runs You Over Very Reactive	Obedient Trusting Motivated Calm	Very Smart Friendly Bites/Strikes Troublemaker Willful Playful	High Energy Runner Very Quick	High Intelligence
Spooks Easily						Most Dominant
Lacks Confidence		Non Thinker Shy and Timid Unpredictable	The Star & The Pleaser	Stubborn Lacks Interest Bucks/Charges Lazy No Motivation Clever		Tolerant
Low Intelligence	Lots of Stop Moves Slowly No Energy	Non Trusting Explodes Kicks in Fear			Lots of Stop Moves Slowly No Energy	Very Curious
The Submissive Grandma			The Dominant Piker			Not Concerned
						Lots of Confidence

Herd Hierarchy and Nagality Characteristics:

One of the many things that I learned from the Colonel watching his wild horse herd for hours on end is the hierarchy of the herd. Every horse from the most dominant alpha mare all the way down to the most submissive has their place in the herd.

When the herd is in motion, it is the most dominant that is in the lead, and the most submissive bringing up the rear.

I also learned many years ago from the Colonel that the most desirable horses from a nagality standpoint are those that travel in the middle of the herd.

Certainly there are exceptions, but as a general rule this holds true as evidenced by cowboys picking horses out of the remuda who tend to go for the middle of the herd. And

if you have ever watched the “Road to the Horse” competition, one of the main criteria in picking a horse out of the herd is where that horse travels in the herd when they are running loose in the arena, near the middle being the most desirable.

Does that mean that horses in the front and the rear of the herd are worthless? Quite the contrary, it just means that from a training standpoint you may have more training challenges with horses that have extreme nagalities.

Now let’s refer to the attached Herd Nagality Chart.

The far right of the chart represents the most dominant of the herd. In general, horses that are dominant have the characteristics of being highly intelligent, tolerant, very curious,

not concerned with much, and they usually have a lot of confidence.

On the other hand, horses represented on the far left of the chart are the most submissive, and they are characteristically more nervous, spook easily, lack confidence, and have lower intelligence.

We can break down the Most Dominant of the herd into two categories. The Dominant Boss in general has more energy, likes to run, and is usually pretty quick. The Dominant Piker, as I like to term them, moves slower, likes to stop, and has a lower energy level.

We can also break down the Most Submissive of the herd into two categories. The Submissive Hot Rod, just like the Dominant Boss, has more energy, likes to run, and is usually pretty quick. And the Submissive Grandma, like the Dominant Piker, has a tendency to move slower, likes to stop, and has a lower energy level.

So, as you can see, I basically break down Nagalities into six categories:

1. Dominant Boss
2. Dominant Piker
3. Submissive Hot Rod
4. Submissive Grandma
5. Middle of the Herd Pleaser
6. Middle of the Herd Star

So now, let's talk about the specific nagality traits of these six general categories:

The Boss:

These horses are usually very smart, and are the friendly type. They tend to be the trouble makers that like to bite and have a tendency to strike rather than kick. They are usually very

playful, willful, and a lot of these horses seem to be mouthy, (chew on the lead rope, etc.).

The Piker:

These guys can have a stubborn streak, and lack interest. They have a tendency to buck and charge. They usually lack motivation and have a tendency to be lazy. They also tend to be the clever types that will cheap shot you when you least expect it.

The Hot Rod:

Hot Rods are usually high headed and the antsy types. They are usually impulsive with their actions and the type that will run you over. They tend to be very alert and very reactive.

The Grandma:

I like to think of this nagality as a grandmother type that worries about everything. They are shy and timid, and don't do much thinking. They tend to be unpredictable and non trusting. They are the type that will kick in fear and explode when too much pressure is put on them.

Now let's discuss the middle of the herd types that I term the Pleaser and the Star. Realistically, you can't cut a green horse out of the middle of the herd and expect that he will fit one of these two types.

The Pleaser:

Pleasers are horses that seem to try very hard to do whatever you ask them to do. They are confident, trusting, and may not be the smartest horse in the herd, but they try their best. I like

to think of them as a football running back. Maybe not an A student, but they will put their head down and run hard each and every play for the entire game. They don't ask questions, get along with everybody, and just do their job.

The Star:

This is the college football star type that is all around good at everything, but does not let it go to his head. These horses learn fast, are confident, trusting, and don't come along very often.

So basically the Pleaser and the Star types of horses tend to show a nagality of being more trusting, motivated, calm, and obedient—and easier to train..

From a practical standpoint, each and every horse does not fit perfectly into one of these categories. These six nagality types are merely broad strokes for horse nagalities, and there could be hundreds of such categories. One common nagality type that I see a lot of is a Boss with a Grandma type.

The important thing to remember though, is that it takes time, including many hours of working with your horse, to identify a horse's nagality type. However, knowing your horse's nagality can really help you for two reasons.

First off, knowing your horse's nagality can help you make decisions about his future. If he is a horse that his nagality does not make him

a good candidate for a cutting or reining horse, he may be better suited for running barrels or a rope horse. Or maybe his nagality does not fit your level of knowledge, confidence, and personality. Figuring that out early on can save you from a potentially trouble-plagued partnership that can prove to be frustrating, expensive, and dangerous.

Secondly, understanding your horse's nagality can be very beneficial with regard to how you approach his training. Tailoring a training program to fit a horse's nagality will make you much more successful.

More on that to come.

Okay, so now that you have the general feel for the six nagalities, what next?

When we get to the "Profiling Your Horse" section of our program, one of the things I will have you do is take a stab at determining the nagality of your horse.

I will have you take the attached "Herd Nagality Chart" and highlight the characteristics listed on the chart that describe those of your horse. This will give you a starting point as far as understanding the nagality of the horse you are working with.

The goal is to go through this exercise periodically through the training process in hopes of decreasing the most dominant and most submissive traits, and increasing the traits characteristic of the middle of the herd.

Determining Nagalities by Physical Characteristics:

Although a pretty inexact science, there are certain physical characteristics that seem to be common with specific nagalities. I have compiled them below based on what I learned from the old timers and from my past experiences with the many horses I have come in contact with. In keeping with the herd hierarchy format that

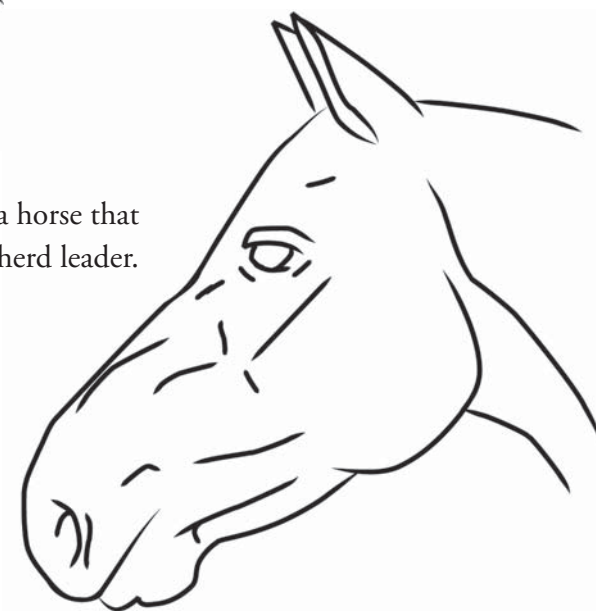
we discussed in the previous section, I have presented the physical characteristics common within the Dominant, Middle of the Herd, and the Submissive. Importantly, these physical characteristics discussed are not the ultimate determinant of nagality, but rather a tool to assist you along the way.

Head Profiles—Dominant:



1. A long moose nose with a dish face usually indicates a horse with high intelligence and confidence.

2. A moose nose is usually a horse that has the characteristics of a herd leader.

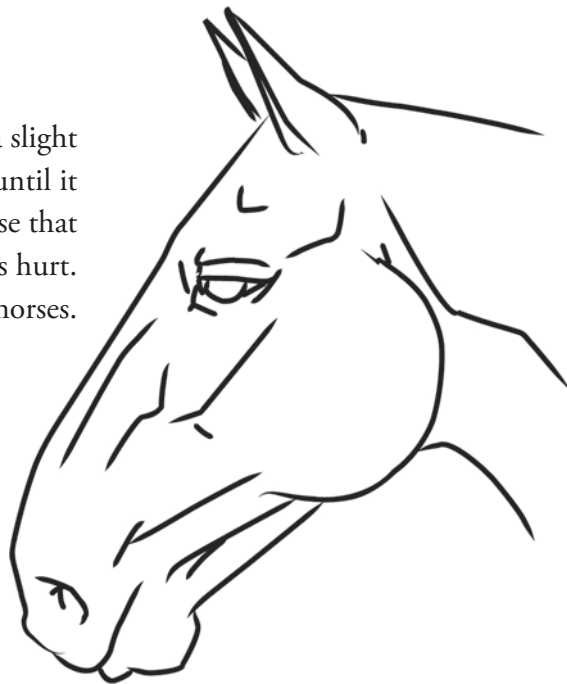


Head Profiles—Middle of the Herd:



1. A head that has a straight flat profile is usually a horse that is a quick learner and uncomplicated.

2. A Roman nose where there is a slight bulge below the eyes that runs until it reaches the nose indicates a horse that is very tough and seldom ever gets hurt. They usually make great school horses.



Head Profiles—Submissive:



1. A dish face usually indicates a sensitive and sometimes timid nagality.

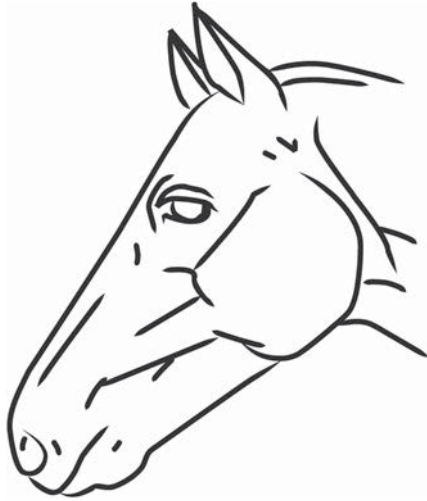
2. When you combine a dish face with a moose nose and bulge between the eyes, it usually means a nagality of being difficult. These horses usually need a lot a patience and understanding.



3. This Roman head profile where the head bulges out from the forehead to above the middle of the nose, then downward, usually is characteristic of a horse that is slow to learn and stubborn. If you push these horses too fast, they will become resistant.



Head Profiles—Submissive (continued):



4. For a horse with a long nose, determined by measuring from the bottom of the protruding cheek bone to the upper lip; if that measurement is longer than average in relation to the rest of the head, and the jowl is small, it usually indicates a slow-witted horse.

5. A long narrow head means he will usually be willing to do what you ask as long as you move slow, and give him simple and clear directions. These horses usually require a lot of patience.



6. When the head is wide from the mid-nose bone to jaw line, and they have an undefined jowl, they are usually a slow learner and not very flexible.

7. A wide or prominent nose bone can indicate inflexibility.



Bumps and Bulges—Dominant & Middle of the Herd:

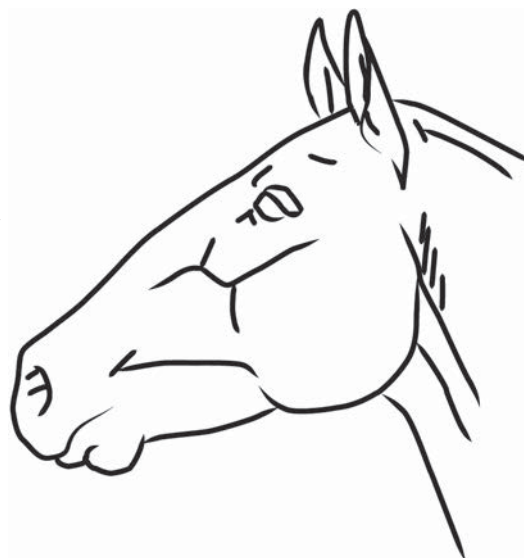
No real indicators

Bumps and Bulges—Submissive:



1. A bulge between the eyes can indicate a horse that is unpredictable and may be a slow learner.

2. When there is a broad bump below the eyes, it may indicate of horse that is inflexible and will resist under pressure.



3. A horse with a small bump several inches below the eyes can indicate a horse that has quick shifts in behavior. They also don't do very well with submissive-type training.

Muzzle—Dominant:



1. Horses with a sloping muzzle usually are very testy in everything they do.

2. If you combine a sloping muzzle with a moose nose, it usually is indicative of a horse that is very dominant.



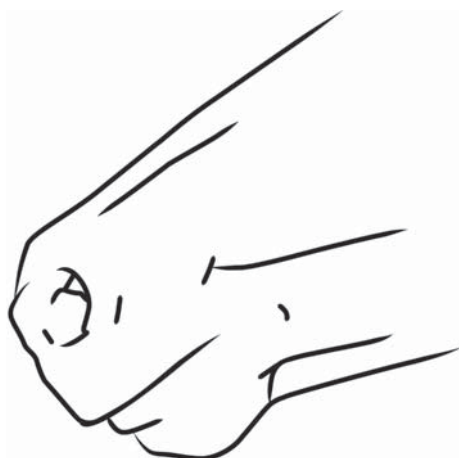
3. A small complex muzzle usually means a horse that is very opinionated.

4. Arabian horses characteristically have a very small muzzle, which indicates intelligence and sensitivity.



FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: NAGALITY

Muzzle—Middle of the Herd:



1. Horses with a square muzzle usually have a stable and uncomplicated nature.

Muzzle—Submissive:



1. A refined and soft muzzle can indicate a sensitive nagality.

2. A rounded muzzle usually means a nagality that is inflexible and they tend to be slow learners.



The Jowls—Dominant:

There is somewhat of an overlap of a large and round jowl. It can indicate high intelligence, but usually comes along with being very cooperative. As a result I have listed it under middle of the herd.

The Jowls—Middle of the Herd:

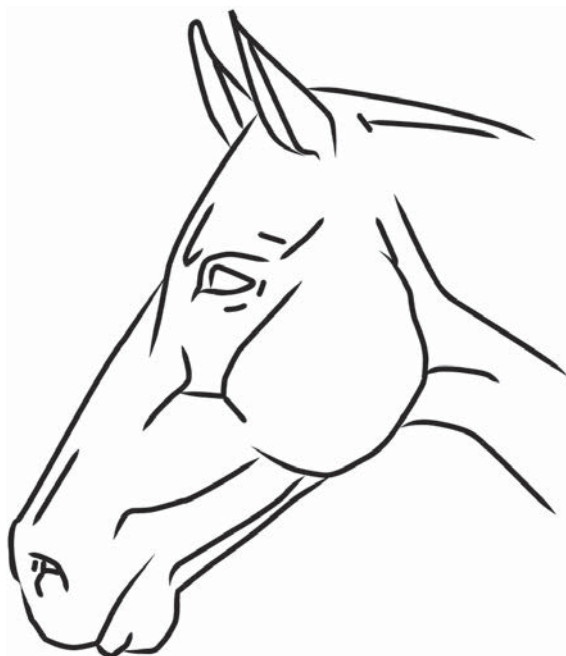


1. Large and round jowls usually indicate a horse that is cooperative and intelligent.

2. Medium jowls can indicate a horse that is average as far as his ability to learn. I still like these horses since good training methods bring them way beyond average.



The Jowls—Submissive:



1. Horses with small jowls are usually a little slower to understand. Sometimes this indicates a smaller space for their windpipe, which can restrict breathing and a lack of confidence when their athletic ability is limited.

Lips—Dominant:



1. When the upper lip is shaped like an upside-down heart, it can indicate an outgoing expressive horse that is very curious.

2. A flat upper lip as seen from the front of the horse can indicate an independent single-minded nagality.



Lips—Dominant (continued):



3. A mobile upper lip is characteristic of a dominant character that is mouthy and curious.

Lips—Middle of the Herd:



1. A relaxed upper lip can mean a relaxed attitude.

Lips—Submissive:



1. An extended upper lip can indicate a horse that is nervous or uncertain.

Lips—Submissive (continued):



2. A flapping lower lip can mean the horse is nervous and overly sensitive. If the lip just droops, but does not flap, the horse can be a slow learner.

3. Like above, a drooping lower lip can mean a slow learner.



4. A stiff upper lip can indicate a very submissive horse that does not like the company of humans.

5. Horses exhibiting a complex lip and chin can be just that, a complex nagality.

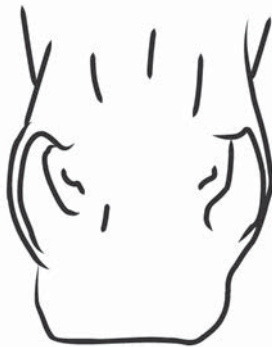


Nostrils—Dominant:



1. Nostrils that are large open and moveable are usually a sign of a horse that is intelligent and very active.

2. When the nostrils are large and open, loose at the bottom and flaring at the top, it can indicate a horse that thinks a lot and is highly intelligent. On the other hand, if the skin just above the flare of the nostril is loose, it can indicate that the horse snorts excessively, and has a tendency to shy.

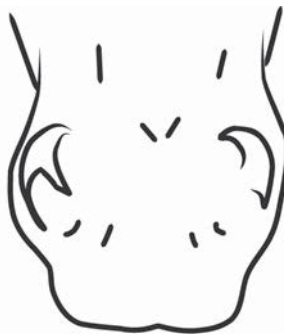


3. If the edges of the nostrils are well defined it can indicate high intelligence.

4. Shapely nostrils that are fluted at the top can signify a smart horse that thinks a lot. But if the skin an inch above the top of the nostril is loose, it indicates the horse has a tendency to react and snort and shy.



Nostrils—Middle of the Herd:



1. Average size nostrils that are as wide at the base as they are at the top usually signifies average intelligence.

Nostrils—Submissive:



1. Nostrils that are open and rounded at the top can mean very alert and antsy.

2. When the nostrils are narrow and inflexible it can be a sign of low intelligence and a horse that is slow to learn.



FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: NAGALITY

Chin—Dominant:



1. A long flat narrow chin can indicate high intelligence. Usually these horses have a longer than normal mouth. Often these horses can be difficult.

2. Horses with a double chin are usually pretty clever.



Chin—Middle of the Herd:



1. A round a soft chin is usually characteristic of a horse that is easy going and uncomplicated.

Chin—Middle of the Herd (continued):



2. Horses with a medium thick chin that is relaxed that have a 45 degree angle from the point of the chin to the lower lip usually are pretty steady cooperative horses.

3. A short and rounded chin can be a sign of a dependable horse.



Chin—Submissive:



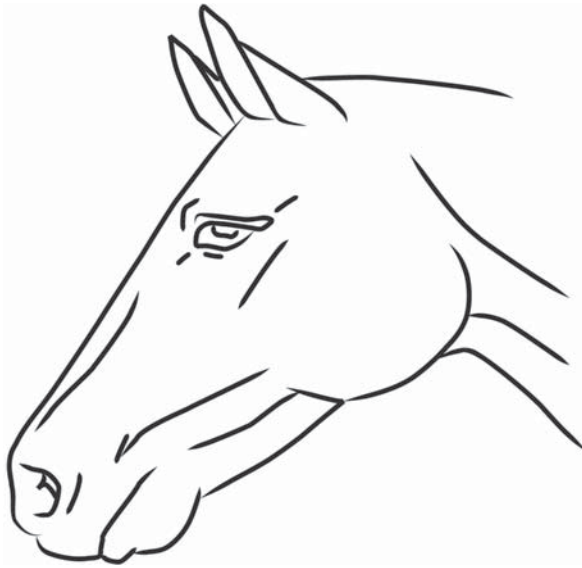
1. A complex chin usually is a sign of a complex nagality.

2. Horses with a pointed and hard chin be neurotic and hard to change.



FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: NAGALITY

Mouth—Dominant:



1. A very long mouth can indicate a horse that is very intelligent and has the ability to learn very quickly. These type of horses are the classic slacker types that get bored very easily, which can be interpreted as a bad attitude.

2. When the mouth is full at the top it can indicate a nagality that is stubborn and resistant. It's best to avoid confrontations with these horses.



Mouth—Middle of the Herd:



1. When the mouth is medium in length it really does not indicate any real trait, so you have to look at other characteristics.

Mouth—Submissive:



1. A short mouth indicates a horse that is a slow learner. They are usually inflexible, and do not carry a bit very well. In severe cases it's best to use a hackamore and avoid a bit all together.

Eyes—Dominant:



1. There can be a lot of crossover between dominators and middle of the herd as far as eye characteristics are concerned. Anyway, when the eyes are set wide on the head, it is definitely a sign of intelligence. These horses are usually so smart they can take advantage of those who are not experienced.



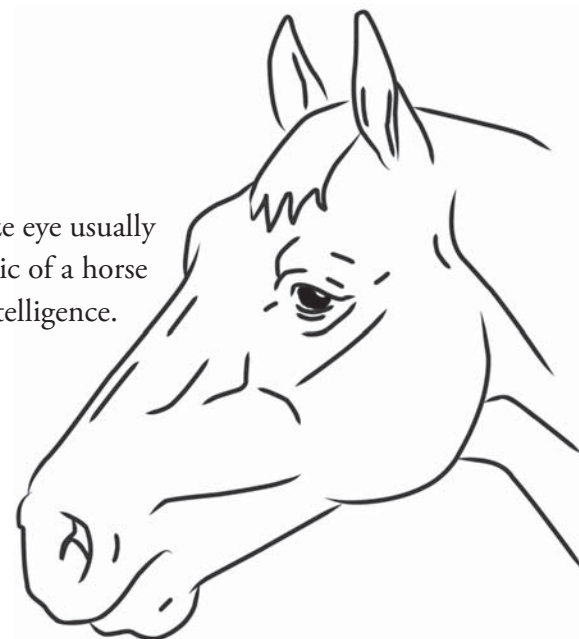
2. A large and hard round eye is usually seen in a racehorse. They are very proud and independent.

Eyes—Middle of the Herd:



1. A large round soft eye usually indicates a horse that is willing and trusting of people.

2. A medium-size eye usually is characteristic of a horse with average intelligence.



3. In my experiences, a triangular eye usually means average intelligence.

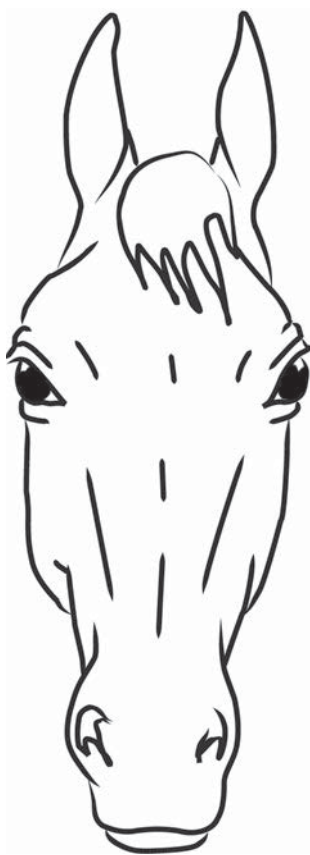


Eyes—Middle of the Herd (continued):



4. When a horse has an almond-shaped eye, it can sometimes mean an introvert, but more often than not, I find them to be willing and cooperative.

Eyes—Submissive:



1. Narrow between the eyes is usually an indication of a slow learner. These type of horses, however, may make good schooling horses since they remember things well and can be Steady Eddy types after that.



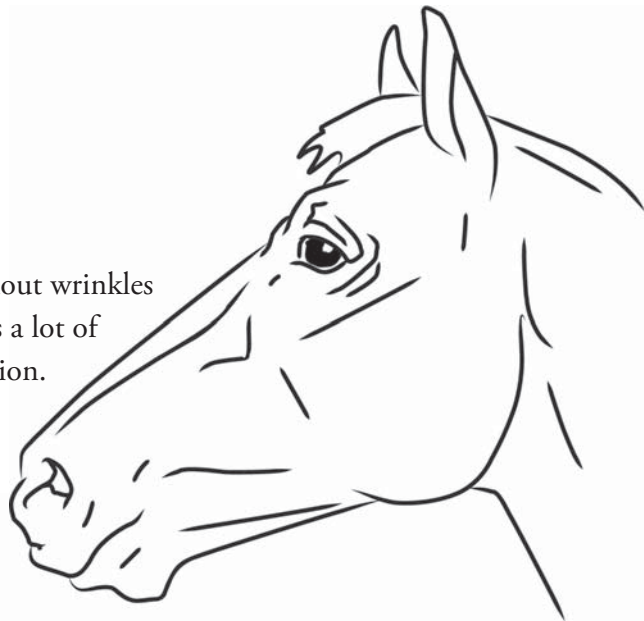
2. When the eyes are set high on the head, it can indicate a horse that is a slow learner.

Eyes—Submissive:



3. When you see wrinkles above the eyes, it usually means the horse is unsure. It's kind of like he is worried about something. If it occurs during training, you know to break things down further so he understands.

4. A tight round eye without wrinkles can mean the horse has a lot of anxiety and tension.



5. A small pig eye usually indicates a horse that is inflexible and does not respond well to pressure.

Eyes—Submissive (continued):



6. When you see white sclera around the eye, it is normal in a horse with a blaze, or Appaloosa horses. Other horses with this trait are usually skittish and shy easily.



7. When you see a white ring around the eye in solid colored horses, white below or above the pupil doesn't really mean anything if it doesn't change with mood. If it does, however, it can indicate a horse with nagality imbalance.



8. If the eye is hooded, and half closed, it can indicate a slow learner and low intelligence.

Eyes—Submissive:



9. When the eyes are set back on the sides of their head, they can be fearful and shy easily because they can't see that well.



10. Horses that have deep indentations above their eyes are usually stressed, or have led a stressful life with poor nutrition.

Ears—Dominant:



1. Ears that are fine, fluted, and with definition indicate a horse with high intelligence.

Ears—Dominant (continued):



2. Horses with short or pin ears are usually smart and willful.

3. Tufts in the ears can indicate a horse that is inflexible and willful.



Ears—Middle of the Herd:



1. When the ears are wider apart at the top than the base, it usually indicates horses that are steady, and they tend to be uncomplicated.

Ears—Middle of the Herd:



2. When the ears are set wide apart at the base, it indicates a horse that is steady and learns well.



3. Lop-eared horses are usually very dependable.

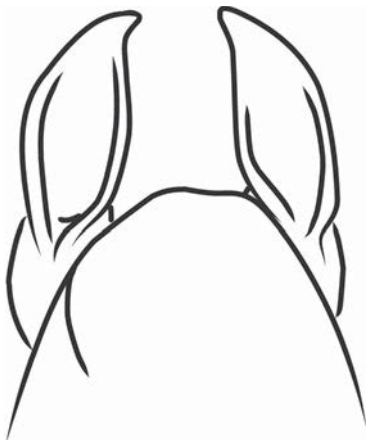


4. Broad shapely ears can also mean steadiness and reliability.

5. Broad ears with little definition is like a football running back; not many questions, and they will just cooperate with whatever you want done. They are usually medium learners.

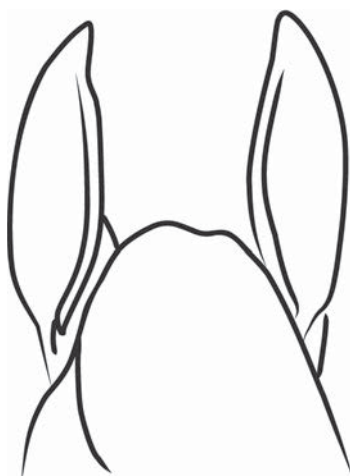


Ears—Submissive:



1. When the space between the ears is narrower at the top than the base, usually it's a horse that is hot and spirited, characteristic in Arabs and Morgan horses.

2. If the ears stand straight up and are set wide at the base and the top, it can signify a horse that is very energetic and can be hot.



3. When the ears are long with a narrow space at both the top and base, it can indicate a horse that is inconsistent.

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: NAGALITY

Before I finish our discussion on physical characteristics and their relationship to nagality, let me mention a couple of other things.

First off, many people have asked me if there is any relationship between coat color and nagality. I can honestly say that I have not really found any real relationships, nor have I learned any from the old timers.

The only hint of a relationship is with roan horses. Many of them that I have run across seem to have a stubborn streak about them. With that said, however, some of the best horses I have ever owned were roan horses.

Anyway, there's an old adage among horsemen that says a good horse is never a bad color. While that may very well be true, ask a group of horse owners what their favorite coat color is, and you will likely get some pretty strong and different opinions.

Enough said.

Also, I wanted to touch briefly on breeds of horses and their respective personalities.

I won't get into an in-depth discussion since I am not really qualified to do so. What I can tell you though is this: Horses are mammals, and as such are warm-blooded creatures as opposed to cold-blooded reptiles. However, these words have developed a separate meaning in the context of equine terminology—used to describe temperament, not body temperature.

For example, the hot bloods, like a thoroughbred, exhibit more sensitivity and energy. Cold bloods, which are most draft breeds, are quieter and calmer.

So most breeds today, like the quarter horse,

are warm bloods, which is a combination of hot and cold bloods.

This classification includes European, Asian, and American breeds, as well as a variety of color types. Warm-blooded breeds are among the most popular of horses.

Anyway, quarter horses, which are warm bloods, are probably one of the most popular breeds in the U.S. Like many breeds, they have tried to breed horses over the years to select for nagalities that are characteristic of horses in the middle to front of the herd.

So with that said, there are nagality characteristics within different breeds, but just like color, you're going to get a lot of varying opinions.

Okay, so now that we have a feel for physical characteristics and how they might affect nagality, how do we put them to use?

First off, when you go through the process of trying to determine your horse's nagality, it is worth your time to take a picture of your horse's head from the side and front. Take those pictures and trace them with a pencil on a sheet of white paper. Then match up the features of your horse with the physical pictures we just discussed and take note of the resulting characteristics.

Also, take time to study this characteristic discussion and pictures. This knowledge can be helpful when evaluating a horse you are going to purchase or to decide if there is a possible nagality that does not fit with your level of knowledge or confidence.

Now let's move on to how we approach our training based on various nagalities.

Tailoring Communication & Training Methods to Fit Specific Nagalities

Just like the Herd Nagality Chart I discussed with you in the determining nagality section, I have outlined training strategies and considerations based on nagalities on the attached Nagality Training Considerations and Strategies chart.

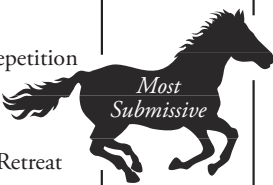
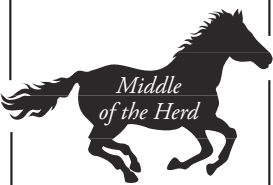

General strategies for training the most dominant or far right of the chart include variety, moving on without dwelling too long on any one thing, giving them a job to keep their interest, and more work outside rather than inside an arena or round pen.

The general strategies for submissive horses at the far left of the chart include more consistency, repetition and approach, and retreat.

As far as general strategies for the four specific categories, the Boss and Hot Rod types need more quick task-type of training regimes compared to the Grandma and Piker that need things to be slowed down.

So now let's get down to specific strategies for each of the six categories:

NAGALITY TRAINING CONSIDERATIONS & STRATEGIES

General Strategies	General Strategies	Specific Strategies	Specific Strategies	Specific Strategies	General Strategies	General Strategies
The Submissive Hot Rod			The Dominant Boss			
Consistency	Quick Task	Safety Lots of Maneuvers Advance Bit Aids	Fine Tune Pressures	Play Establish Control Training Fun	Quick Task	Variety
Repetition		Comfort Reassurance & Calmness Less is More Very Neutral Approach			Move On	Give Them a Job
Retreat						
	Slow Down		The Star & The Pleaser	Incent Short Sessions More Stimulation	Slow Down	More Outside Work
The Submissive Grandma			The Dominant Piker			

The Dominant Boss:

Keep in mind that these horses like to play, so you must keep them interested by letting them think they are having fun. In addition, you must not only establish, but also maintain control through leadership.

The challenge with these horses is that they feel higher in the pecking order than their riders. They want to run the show, and they will fight, rear, or run off.

So with a Boss, we have to figure out a way of letting them know we are in charge. We have to stay away from crossing the line as a predator, and find a way of establishing control and being one step above the horse. If we can't do that, we won't get anywhere with this type of horse.

My strategy with a Boss is to move up the pecking order without getting in a confrontation. If you get in a fight with a Boss, you are going to lose.

First off, hobble training and leaving these horses hobbled and tied for several hours at a time goes a long way in establishing leadership. It's not cruel, and it is very effective in building leadership.

I also try to make each training session especially fun for these horses. I don't want them to know that they are being trained. I do want them to think that they are just out having a good time.

If things are not going well with a step within the training pyramid, I won't dwell on it. I will back off to a step below that he already understands and is easy for him. Then after he has relaxed, I will move back to the next step.

Usually I will see a big improvement, then I quit him for the day. The horse improved and

he didn't know it. And, more importantly, we did it without a confrontation.

If I do have to bring up the pressure to make the wrong thing difficult, I do it quickly and more harshly than with another nagality, then I let the horse relax.

The Dominant Piker:

Remember that these horses need incentive, more stimulation than most horses, and shorter training sessions in general.

The challenge with slackers is that they are, in my opinion, the toughest to train because they have no respect. These types can also make lousy show horses since they know you can't get after them in the show pen.

My strategy with the slacker is to use hobble training—tied up with hobbles—to gain respect. I also don't have long training sessions with Pikers.

The main thing is to use more stimulation with your aids to get more impulsion. I will often use a riding crop or dressage whip to accentuate my leg aids more often with the Piker.

With a Piker, you have to be very careful not to keep applying pressure, as they will become numb to pressure very easily.

With this kind of horse you get the message across, then leave him alone. If we are working on a step that he already understands and he is not putting effort into it, I will get after him hard—but not crossing the line—for a short amount of time, then back off.

The Submissive Hot Rod:

Our approach with a Hot Rod is to remember that feeling safe is important to them;

we need to incorporate a lot of maneuvers in our training, and we advance them more quickly in our bit aids.

The challenge with a Hot Rod is to keep him under control even when he's flying, because he will want to fly.

Hot Rods can be a good fit for certain types of riders as long as that energy can be channeled in the right direction. For example, these horses usually make a better barrel horse than a western pleasure or reining horse.

My strategy with these horses is collection at all speeds. It's a real challenge to teach a Hot Rod to be calm, but if you have taught him to be collected at any speed, you can get through any maneuver.

To achieve that, I spend a lot more time doing steps that involve gymnastics, such as reverse arcs, leg yields, two tracks, etc. These steps limber the horse up, and help him to relax as they manipulate the horse's shoulders, ribs, and hips.

Also, as you will learn in my program, I teach in a snaffle bit, but advance as we go up the pyramid, eventually to a spade bit.

With the Hot Rod, I will advance more quickly and teach in what I call a transition bit. The reason I use a more severe bit is that the horse will pick up on the bit and I won't have to pull on him as much. More on that later.

The Submissive Grandma:

Remember, these horses seek comfort, reassurance and calmness. Usually, less is more with these horses, and we must take a very neutral approach.

These horses really benefit from connection,

relaxation, rhythm, and predictability. The Grandma is a high stress, nervous horse that can be good on Monday and terrible on Tuesday. If they have no physical problems, we are left wondering why things are not going so well. If you turn up the volume with this kind of horse they won't respond well, and will perform even worse the next day.

The challenge with the Grandma is that we have to work on their time frame, not ours.

A slower approach leads to faster progress with this kind of horse. Generally, they will catch up if we go slow in the early stages of training.

My strategy with these horses is to use reassurance and calmness. I also leave them tied up and walk around them while saddling other horses, just letting them relax. Also, when leaving them tied up, I like to tie them so they can view the arena or round pen. That way, they can get relaxed while viewing other horses being worked. I also like to turn these horses out a lot.

In the arena, I like to get an assistant to sit on the Grandma when I am working another horse. And since I am the one putting pressure on him, I like to have someone else warm him up and cool him down, so he stays relaxed going into a session.

As we have discussed, it's never good to train with a temper, and that is really important with these horses. You need to be very light in correction (making the wrong thing difficult) with these horses.

Less is more, meaning less and lighter pressures with your aids. If a fight starts with a Grandma, quit him. I tie him up, go do

something else, and come back later. By the time I get back to him, he is usually more relaxed, and the problem is gone.

**The Pleaser and the Star
(Middle of the Herd):**

For the Star, everything comes very easily. For the Pleaser, they may not have a lot of ability, but they try really hard to do whatever you ask them to do. Both types can turn out to be great horses.

The challenge with these horses is that we get to thinking that we are great trainers. The fact is, they are just easy to train. What usually happens to these horses is we either apply too much pressure early on because everything seems so easy for these horses, or we recognize that risk, and don't advance the horses quickly enough up the pyramid and it takes longer for

them to reach their full potential.

My strategy with this type of horse is to advance him in a consistent fashion one step at a time up the pyramid. Then maybe once a week I will step up the pace to see how he reacts, then I back off. That gives me a good feel for how much new pressure he can comfortably take.

Okay, I think that about wraps up my thoughts on nagality. Hopefully, you now have a good feel for the six general nagalities, and the training strategies I employ to be more successful with these nagalities. Also, although an inexact science, you now have some tools to determine nagalities based on physical characteristics.

In the next section, I will give you my thoughts on confirmation and how confirmation can affect performance and nagality.

With that, let's go to the next section.

Confirmation

The main thing to remember with confirmation is that very few horses are perfect. This discussion is meant to give you the tools to evaluate a horse's confirmation and to determine if the flaws you identify will have a potential impact on performance, health, and his nagality. As you gain experience and see a lot of horses, these concepts will become second nature to you.

Let's start with the balance of the horse by comparing the measurement of the girth vs. the flank.

Using a tape measure, lay it over the middle of the withers so it falls perpendicular to the ground of both sides just behind the elbows.

Then measure the heart girth circumference. Then measure the flank by placing the tape

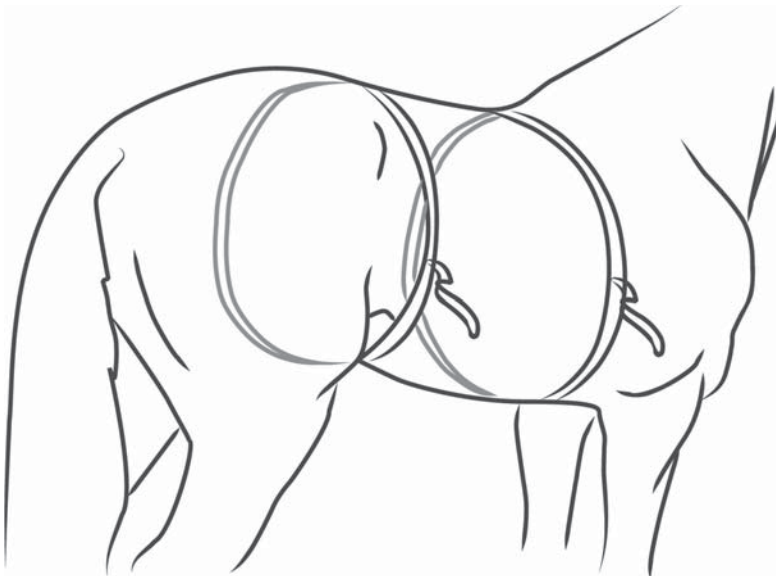
across the loins so it falls perpendicular to the ground on both sides just in front of the stifle. Then measure the flank circumference.

The average horse measures one-to-two inches less in the flank vs. the heart girth.

If the measurement is more than three or four inches less, it is difficult to keep a saddle on the horse without a snug breast collar and keeping the cinch very tight.

Either of these can irritate the horse causing behavioral problems. Also, it's important to remember that about two-thirds of a horse's weight is carried on its front feet. That's why it is so much harder for a horse to move his front end over as opposed to disengaging his hindquarters. And that's the reason we spend so much effort getting a horse to balance by collecting him and getting his hind feet under him. As a result, horses that are much lighter in the flank area vs. the heart girth may have more problems collecting themselves and moving in a more balanced fashion.

In extreme cases, I have seen horses heavy in the front that have a tendency to trip with their front feet. So it's worth doing this measurement, especially if you are considering the purchase of a horse with this possible flaw.

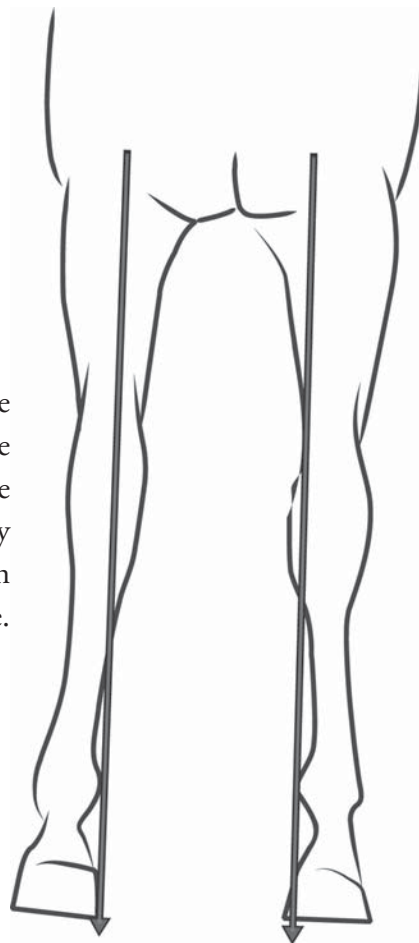


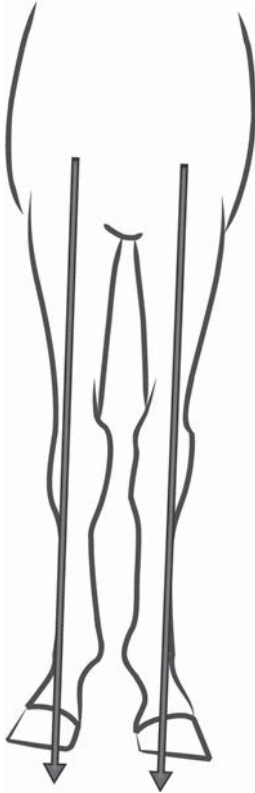
FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: CONFIRMATION



Now let's compare abnormal vs. normal confirmation of the front legs. If we look at the front view, and drop a plumb line from the chest down the front leg on a normal horse, it should pass the middle of the forearm, middle of the knee, middle of the fetlock, and middle of the hoof.

Now some abnormal situations. If the horse has a wide base and is broad chested, he can tend to be on the slow side. And if he is wide based, but narrow at the chest, they can have poor balance, which can result in being more on the skittish side.



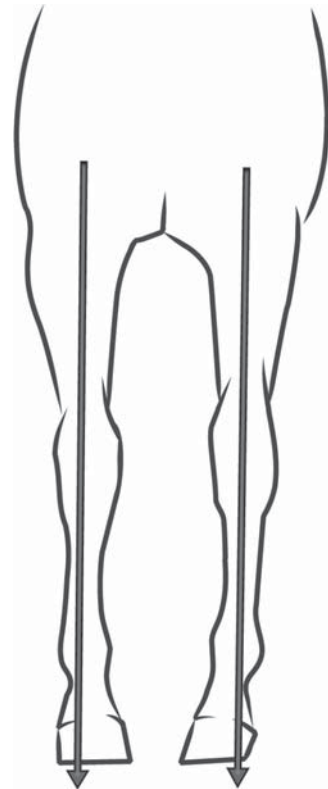


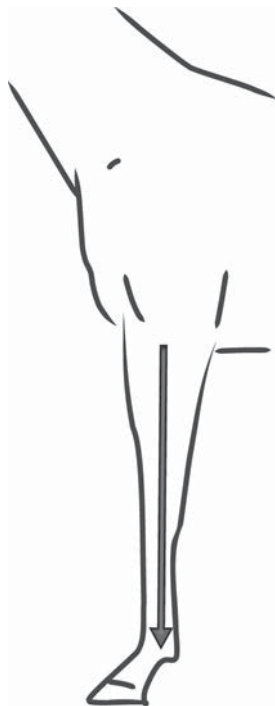
Horses that are narrow at the base, with splay feet (toes turned out), narrow chest, and slanted knees have a limited weight carrying capacity. As a result, they lack self confidence and usually are fearful, flighty, poor athletes, and are unreliable. This is all a result of their mental imbalance due to this physical imbalance.



When a horse is splay-footed (toes turned out) and wide at the base, that usually doesn't affect his nagality, but it can limit his athletic ability.

Another common flaw is pigeon toes. In these horses, their athletic ability is sometimes limited, but for the most part I have found that they are usually pretty level headed horses and can make good pleasure or trail horses.

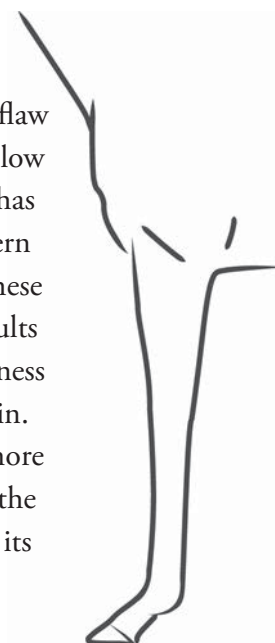




Now let's look at the legs from the side view. An ideal leg from the standpoint of potential soundness and balance should show a plumb line that passes through the center of the forearm, center of the knee, and center of the fetlock.



A very common flaw is a horse that is low in the heels, or has a dropped pastern angle. Both of these confirmation faults can lead to lameness and/or back pain. This can cause more resistance from the horse and limit its performance.

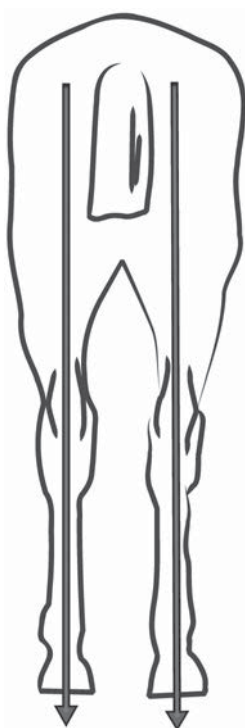


When horses have what we call calf knees, they might not show any problems as long as you are doing light slow work with them. However, if they are used for jumping or you do a lot of fast strenuous work on them, it may cause them to have problems.

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: CONFIRMATION



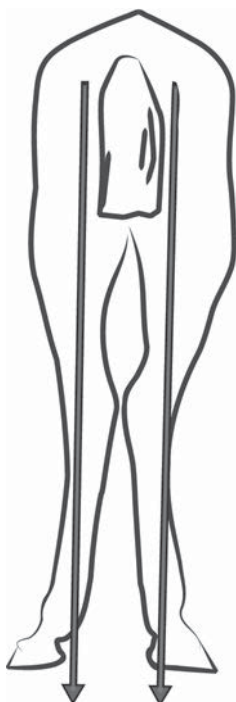
When a horse is over its knees, it can cause tension in its legs, shoulders, and back, which can cause nervous-type behavior. The same thing can be said for horses that are what we call “behind the vertical.”



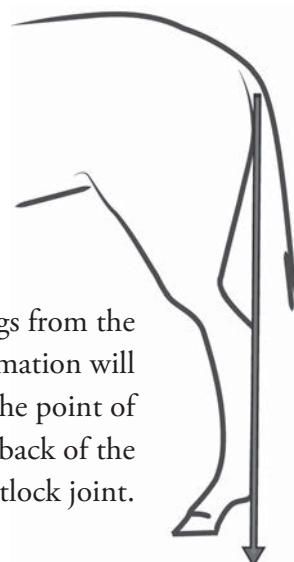
Now let's talk about the back legs. Normal is a straight line from the point of the buttocks through the point of the hocks, fetlock joint, and the heels.



When a horse shows a condition of being narrow at the base, problems can arise due to strain on its pelvis and back from compensating for its imbalance.



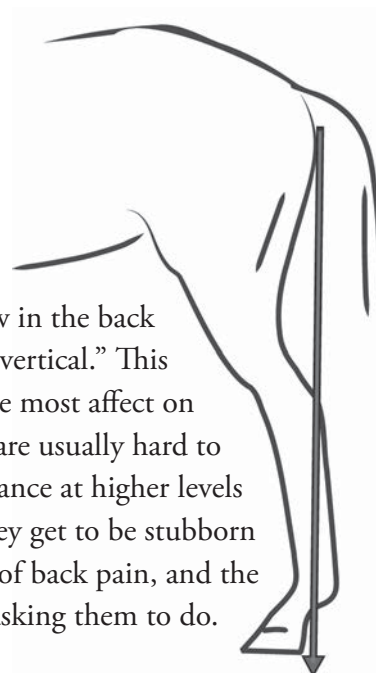
And when you run into a condition of cow hocks, it can cause a horse to resist because of weakness and fatigue when athletic demands are too great.



If we look at the back legs from the side, the ideal confirmation will show a straight line for the point of the buttocks, down the back of the hock, and back of the fetlock joint.



With the stress of being overworked, sickle hocked horses can develop muscle tightness in the gaskin area, which can cause problems.



Another common confirmation flaw in the back legs is what we call “behind the vertical.” This confirmation fault probably has the most affect on a horse’s nagality. These horses are usually hard to collect and will often show resistance at higher levels of athletic performance. When they get to be stubborn or unwilling it is usually a result of back pain, and the inability to do what you are asking them to do.

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: CONFIRMATION



Let's talk necks. Length, thickness and how the neck connects to the body can have a major impact on behavior. A horse that has a clean throatlatch and an ideal length of the neck placed nicely on the shoulders will be much more balanced and coordinated.

If a horse has a thin stick neck, it will have a hard time with collection and balance.



When a horse has a short neck with a thick throat latch, they can really be resistant to collection because it is so physically hard for them to give you its face. These horses can make great trail horses, but you may run into behavioral problems if you ask too much of them.

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING THE RIGHT START: CONFIRMATION



If a horse has what we call a ewe neck, it could often have difficult and resistant nagalities. The ewe neck can cause the horse's back to drop and tighten up, which can affect his breathing and balance.

As far as backs are concerned, the major flaws I see most often are usually high withers vs. a rounded back or no withers. High withers is rarely a problem unless you have a poor saddle fit. And, ideally, you want a higher vs. no wither to keep the saddle from rolling. This is especially important in horses used for roping.



So just like we did with our exercise on determining nagalities based on physical characteristics, I strongly recommend you take a picture of your horse from the side, back, and front view. Then match it up with these illustrations to identify confirmation flaws. Once identified, confirmation flaws can have an influence on your horses's potential and explain certain nagality traits. Also, they can be a factor to consider before purchasing a horse.

Self Assessment

Just like about everything in life, you get out of it what you put into it. How true that is especially with your relationship with horses.

Everybody has different goals they want to achieve. It runs the gamut from those of you that want to compete or train horses at the highest level, to those of you that are content with just a simple ride every Saturday morning, and all of you in between.

I think the key to being successful with horses really comes down to two things:

1. Gaining the knowledge to be successful at whatever level meets your interest and commitment, and;
2. Taking a common sense approach to determine how you can be successful and get the most enjoyment with your relationship with horses in as safe a way as possible.

These two things fall under what I call self assessment. You need to look in the mirror and be realistic with your expectations about yourself. That includes asking yourself some pretty simple questions like: “How much time do I have to commit to this?”; “What is my level of interest?”; “What is my level of expertise?”; “What is my personality type?”; “What are my physical limitations, if any?”; and “What am I financially willing and able to commit?”

So let’s just discuss for a minute why asking yourself these questions can be so beneficial.

The time you have to commit makes a lot of difference. If you are a weekend warrior that only has time to ride on a Saturday morning,

you are being very unrealistic if you expect to buy a green colt and work him every Saturday morning. Common sense would tell you that an older quiet gelding that won’t get fresh standing in a stall all week is the better option.

On the other hand, if you have the time, your options are expanded.

Your level of interest to expand your knowledge is also very important. If you’re not committed to learn, you will at some point lose confidence and risk getting hurt, or like we talked about in a previous section, you will start using reactive pressures on horses at some point when you have run out of knowledge.

Some of you, and maybe me at times, think we know more than we really do. I’ll be the first to admit, however, that I don’t know everything and I learn something every day from other trainers and horses that I come in contact with.

So be realistic with your level of knowledge, and make sure you don’t put yourself in situations that can get you hurt.

A prime example is putting a rider with a limited vocabulary with a horse that has a limited vocabulary. It’s usually a recipe for disaster.

Our program will help you immensely. However, when you reach a point that you are losing confidence or feel that you need help, get it. Find someone with the knowledge and confidence to help you out. That may mean having a friend help you through a step or steps within our program, or employing a trainer sharing the same philosophies as our program

to help you and your horse.

One of the things I will be talking about in my schools and clinics is personality types and how they relate to various nagalities.

In general, ladies are much slower in their movements, more timid, and patient than us male types who tend to be faster moving, more aggressive, and less patient. Obviously there are exceptions, but these differences are pretty evident.

Having an emotionally neutral training attitude is critical. Where it gets more interesting is when we take the nagality of individual horses into account. A Type-A personality male with a grandmother nagality-type horse is usually a real challenge. Likewise, a timid personality type will have a real challenge with a Boss nagality type horse.

Anyway, this is an area that is well worth analyzing and warrants continued discussion in our program.

Your physical abilities are also very important. If you are out of shape and fifty pounds overweight, you are going to have a hard time developing an independent seat. As a result, you will be limited as to how far up the pyramid you and your horse will progress. But hey, if you are happy and successful making it

to level three or four, more power to you. If not, you owe it to your horse to get into shape so you can advance farther.

And the last one, your finances.

I think the thing we forget about financial commitment is adding knowledge to it. Even if you have all the money in the world, you can still be unsuccessful and lose confidence. I see a lot of people pay for high dollar horses and trainers, but forget to invest in themselves to build the knowledge to be successful at whatever level they desire.

I also see people spending money on trainers that are out there to do just that. They create an annuity by training your horse. They train the horse, you get him home not having the knowledge to succeed with him. He gets messed up and you take him back to the trainer.

That's how a lot of these guys stay in business.

Anyway, you owe it to yourself to become knowledgeable in finding the right people to help you out that have you and your horse's best interest in mind. With that said, I encourage you to attend one of our clinics or schools, and visit our website on a regular basis. That will be a big step in your knowledge and confidence category.

Evaluating Your Horse & Setting Realistic Goals

Before you start level two of the Training and Riding Pyramid, it is well worth your time to go through the process of evaluating your horse as to its nagality and confirmation, and then setting some realistic goals for that horse.

I go through this process for every horse that I train, whether it is a client horse or one of my own horses.

I have attached the Evaluation and Goal Form that you can use to go through this

process. This is a simple form that I developed years ago for use in training horses for clients.

My recommendation is that you complete this form and put it in a three ring binder. You can also use the binder to record your training successes and or training logs as you go along. I will be discussing training logs in the next section, so stand by.

Good luck completing the form!

Evaluation and Goals Form

Horse name: _____

Owner name: _____

General evaluation:

Age: _____ Sex: _____ Breed: _____

Describe training history and current vocabulary level: _____

List any known vices or behavioral issues: _____

Health & Farrier:

Last date: _____ Next date: _____

Current on vaccinations: Yes _____ No _____

Current on worming: Yes _____ No _____

Current on sheath clean: Yes _____ No _____

Current on teeth float: Yes _____ No _____

Current on shoe/trim: Yes _____ No _____

List any known health issues (example: past colic, lameness, feed issues, etc.): _____

Determining Nagality Via The “Herd Nagality Chart”

Highlight all of the behavioral characteristics that fit the subject horse on the attached Herd Nagality Chart. Based on the highlighted characteristics, circle one or more of the nagalities that best describes the subject horse:

Submissive Hot Rod

Dominant Boss

Middle of the Herd Pleaser

Middle of the Herd Star

Submissive Grandma

Dominant Piker

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING STARTED: EVALUATION AND GOALS

Determining Nagality Via Physical Characteristics:

Take photos of the subject horse's head from the front and side. With those pictures, go back to the Nagality section and match the subject horse's characteristics with the physical characteristics that provide the best match. Based on the closest match, describe the resulting nagality, if any.

Characteristic Description:

General Nagality Type:

(Submissive, Middle of the Herd, Dominant)

Head profile:	_____
Bumps and Bulges:	_____
Muzzle:	_____
Lips:	_____
Nostrils:	_____
Chin:	_____
Mouth:	_____
Eyes:	_____
Ears:	_____

Based on Physical Traits, the General Nagality Best Describes the Subject Horse as follows (circle one or more):

Submissive

Middle of the Herd

Dominant

General Training Considerations Based on Nagality:

Based on the general and specific nagality traits identified, describe the general training strategy and considerations to be practiced on the subject horse as you proceed up the Training Pyramid. (Refer back to the Nagality section entitled "Tailoring Communication & Training Methods to Fit Specific Nagalities" to help you complete this section.)

Confirmation:

Refer back to the confirmation section and take pictures of the subject horse similar to the views described. Compare the subject horse's confirmation with confirmation characteristics described and note any potential performance or nagality issues:

Confirmation	Description	Potential Issues
Front Legs Front View:	_____	_____
Front Legs Side View:	_____	_____
Back Legs Back View:	_____	_____
Back Legs Side View:	_____	_____

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING STARTED: EVALUATION AND GOALS

Confirmation	Description	Potential Issues
Neck:	_____	_____
Back:	_____	_____

Also, based on the instructions described in the Confirmation section, the measurement of the girth is _____ vs. the flank _____.

If difference is greater than three inches, note potential issues: _____

Goal Setting:

Describe the end-use goal for the subject horse (example: trail horse, performance, etc.):

After viewing the videos describing the steps within the Training Pyramid levels, the desired level of achievement is Level _____.

In achieving the desired level of achievement, the goal is to eliminate the following behavioral issues and vices:

Considering the nagality of the subject horse, confirmation issues, if any, and the current vocabulary of the horse, are the end use and level desired goals realistic? Yes _____ No _____

If no, list reasons below:

If you checked yes above, then consider whether the end use and level desired goals are realistic based on your self assessment. Remember, as we discussed, success is based on knowledge and common sense and is measured by asking yourself the following questions:

Self Assessment Questions for this Specific Horse:

Do I have the time commitment? Yes _____ No _____

Is my interest level there? Yes _____ No _____

Do I have the appropriate level of experience & expertise? Yes _____ No _____

Do I have the right personality to be successful? Yes _____ No _____

FOUNDATIONS—GETTING STARTED: EVALUATION AND GOALS

Am I physically able? Yes _____ No _____

Am I willing and able to make the financial commitment? Yes _____ No _____

If you answered yes to all of the self assessment questions, you are getting there. If not, at least we are identifying some self assessment issues that may impact your decision to proceed with a training program with this particular horse.

If you checked yes to all of the above questions, it appears that potentially there appears to be a good fit between you and this particular horse. As a result, the chances of you being confident and successful with this horse look quite good.

In moving forward, a realistic time frame to achieve the goals previously discussed is estimated at _____. Again this is subject primarily to the time frame of the horse.

If you checked no to any of the above questions, you should not proceed with this particular horse until you reassess the situation to determine if you and this particular horse are potentially not a good fit.

Using a Training Log

You may think that keeping a training log is just for a trainer that has to keep track of what he is doing with a whole stable of horses.

Well think again.

I personally feel that a training log is part of being successful whether you are training one or a whole stable of horses. If you don't keep a log, you have to trust your memory and, in my case, that's not a good thing. More often than not, without a log, I wind up losing track of where I have been and where I am going. Even though I follow the steps of the training pyramid, it's still easy to lose track.

To me, logs are proof of the progress that I can turn to on those days when nothing is going right, and you wonder why you train horses. They keep me focused so that I am on track to make the most of whatever time I am spending with my horse.

And probably most important is the fact that logs can be a powerful tool for developing a positive relationship with your horse.

With a log, you can keep track of all kinds of information, but the important thing is to not overwhelm yourself trying to keep track of so many things that it becomes a hassle.

The basic information you track may include how much time you spent working the horse, what particular steps you worked on, and how he did when you introduced the next baby step.

Beyond that, it's really up to you on how detailed you get. Some people like to keep track of the weather, the footing, whether the horse was lazy or fresh, and stuff like that.

And your log can be as simple or fancy as you want. It doesn't matter if you use a plain spiral notebook or a fancy log book. I personally prefer a small pressboard notebook that fits in my shirt pocket. It's easy to access to keep them current.

Regardless of what kind of log you use, the main thing is to get in the habit of writing in it every time you work with your horse.

Remember that the whole goal of our program is for you to be successful and have fun with your horse. So the most important thing to write in your log every single day is something good about you and your horse.

Don't use your logs to track all the mistakes he made that day. If you emphasize the negatives, it is non productive and takes the fun out of things. Instead, take the time to write something good about you and your horse, like something you both did well that day, or something you particularly liked about him that day.

So remember, the best thing you can do is keep track of all the positives, all of your daily victories, and that will ensure that your log will help you have a positive, successful, and fun relationship with your horse.

So keep on riding and writing!

The Training Routine

Remember my story in the Journey section on Clem the Pickup Man? His gray gelding was about as finished as a horse gets. Needless to say, it takes a long time to develop a full communication system with a horse and achieve success at Level 9 of our training and riding pyramid.

As we have previously discussed, when you first begin the training process at Level 2 of the pyramid, the horse's vocabulary of understanding is pretty limited, and that limits what you can expect of him. As he learns more, you can expect more.

Eventually there will come a time when you have developed full communication with the horse, and you know he understands what you are asking. At that point, you support every request with a sequence of pressures applied consistently at every stride. Once you and your horse have reached this advanced level (Level 9), you should expect compliance from your horse at every stride. But as I have mentioned before, many of you will be happy and successful just mastering lower levels of the training and riding pyramid.

So let's begin by talking about starting a green horse at Level 2 of the pyramid. We don't expect the horse to understand all of the shapes we want him to take when we apply given pressures since he has little to no vocabulary.

He doesn't understand which physical or psychological pressures we want him to ignore like the cinch or the stirrups slapping at his

sides. He doesn't understand which pressures are methodically applied directional pressures, such as leg pressure on one side asking him to move his hindquarters. And when leading him he doesn't yet understand our body language pressures.

So in the beginning of training, we can't expect much because the horse's vocabulary needs to grow.

So now, with green horses, or seasoned horses that have a lot of holes in their vocabulary, we have to add pressures one by one to build their vocabulary. As we have been preaching, we do this by breaking everything we want to teach into the smallest baby steps that we can. Then we teach each of these things one at a time. That's why each level of the pyramid has tiny steps that build on one another.

There isn't any hard and fast rule about how long an individual training session should last when you are working with a horse. In general, young horses, just like kids, have a shorter attention span compared to an older seasoned horse. Also as we have discussed, certain nagalities require different training approaches. Anyway, I like to think of each training session in thirds, the warm up third, the training third, and a cooling down third.

Let me give you my thoughts on each one.

The Warm up Third:

I like to spend the first third of the session in an arrangement that mentally and physically

gets the horse connected and working in rhythm and relaxation. If he's a real beginner, it may be as simple as just following him around and getting him to pay attention to you. When he's got more vocabulary and is farther up the pyramid, this would be the time to run him through steps he already understands, like longing or bit up exercises. Basically, this is the time you allow him to work slow and pump fluids in his legs from his frog and get his joints working free and muscles warmed up. And, most importantly, this is the time to get his full attention and connection with you.

The Training Third:

The middle or training third is where I practice things the horse already knows, and it's the only time I introduce a new step beyond a step that he already knows.

I never introduce something new out of the clear blue sky. Anything new should only be a tiny baby step away from the prior step that he already has mastered and practiced. I go along at a pace that fits the horse, and I don't hesitate to stop in the middle if things fall apart, and take him back to what he is comfortable with.

My goal here is to keep him interested and keep the rhythm and relaxation going. Also, as you view the training videos you will see that I will let the horse chill when he does things correctly. This is the reward after the release of pressure that lets him rest and relax for doing the right thing.

In order for a horse to learn a new pressure (or step) and add it to his vocabulary, at some point he has to resist things a little bit and you have to give him the right release and timing of

that release. You also have to calm him a little bit and show him that you're his friend and he can trust that you're not going to hurt him.

So that means you can't go around picking fights with him. If I add a new step and everything is good, I may just quit for the day. I then do it again the next day and the next day.

So that's how the pyramid is set up. For example, in Level 2 (groundwork), we take the green horse and get him connecting with us really well with his gear on. When he connects well with the gear on, then we longe him with it on. Then someone just sits on him. Then we connect with him while someone is on his back. Then we longe him with someone on his back. And gradually we add aid pressures and just go along in baby steps that are horse sensible.

Like I keep saying, good horse training should be boring to watch.

The Cooling Down Third:

I use the last third of the session for cooling down and desensitization exercises. If everything has gone along great in the training session, you have practiced the things he already knows, or added another step to his vocabulary while keeping him rhythmic and relaxed, it's time to start cooling him down. The time to start cooling him down is while everything is going well, and before he gets tired, or his attention starts to wander. And depending on his frame of mind, I will work on some sort of desensitization exercise since he is usually tired at this point.

So the take away is that any time you are having a good time and it starts to change, that's the time to cool him down and put him away.

Any time that the relationship between you and the horse seems to be going the wrong way, like he is not interested in you today, or whatever, just let him play for awhile, then put him away. And especially, any time you are not sure what to do next, that's also a good time to quit for the day. Finally, any time you feel you were lucky and got away with something, that's also a great time to put him away.

These are just general guidelines, and the more experienced you get at reading your horse, you will have a better feel as to what is appropriate.

Remember what I have said, and will continue to emphasize. We need to keep the horse interested by giving him a job and changing things up so we set him up to learn

with the horse thinking it's his idea.

To basically summarize, the daily training routine should not be based on a certain set of actions you have decided to teach him according to a particular schedule. The training pyramid provides you with a road map comprised of baby steps to guide you, and the training routine should be based on the horse's reactions to your actions.

Remember that a good training routine maintains both the horse's comfort and attention level.

Okay, those are my thoughts on a training routine, so now we can move on to the next section where I will give you my perspective on training equipment.

Thoughts on Equipment

Boy, talk about a subject that is misunderstood.

Many people out there (especially those that make a living selling their brand of equipment) seem to believe that using a certain piece of equipment will guarantee that a horse will learn something. Or even worse, that a horse will be able to learn faster or easier.

Then you have a whole other contingent of folks that condemn the use of particular pieces of equipment no matter when or how they are used. They just can't see any justification in using that equipment.

Then you have another bunch out there that look down on riders as being ignorant, unskilled, or inhumane for using certain types of equipment.

My opinion, for whatever it is worth, is that general statements about what equipment is good or bad are not very accurate. The way I look at it is that the training equipment has to suit both the horse based on his vocabulary level and the trainer based on his or her knowledge.

So the goal in choosing or using any kind of special training equipment should be the safety of the person first, the safety of the horse second, then the comfort of the horse, and the comfort of the person last.

Since the horse has no say in the comfort area, his comfort should come before the trainer. However, on the safety side, it's the other way around.

Let me give you an example. Many times

equipment that is used to limit a horse's capabilities, like a tie down, is a good thing because it is limiting the horse to the level of the trainer's ability.

Let's say you tell someone who is a poor rider to take the tie down off her horse because you think it's a training crutch, or it's harming the horse by limiting his head. She takes it off and the horse sticks his head up and runs off with her. Do you want to be responsible for that wreck? I don't.

Until both the rider and the horse get more training, the tie down is actually a good thing. And once they both gain more knowledge, it may eventually become a negative factor and will be eliminated without causing a safety issue to the trainer and limit the horse's performance and comfort.

I think another misconception about training equipment occurs when people confuse cause and effect.

Say a trainer sets up a situation to help the horse understand a new concept or pressure. That trainer might use a particular piece of equipment to help the horse figure it out. But when people see the trainer using the equipment, they think the training effect was due to that equipment. They then think that it was the equipment that got the results instead of the trainer.

A great example of this is a round pen. Unless you have a round pen these days, most people won't view you as a successful trainer. But

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the truth is that the lessons we teach a horse in a round pen can just as easily be taught in a square or rectangular pen. The pen does not teach anything. It's the trainer's interaction with the horse that does the teaching.

And my last thought on equipment is the misconception about bits.

There's folks out there that will tell you the snaffle is the only thing you should put in a horse's mouth. And many people think a spade bit is cruel and punishing to use on a horse.

The fact of the matter is that most people really don't understand how a bit really works, but everybody has answers.

Just remember that it's not the equipment you use, but how you use it. And you always

have to put safety first, remembering that your primary objective in any training session is connection with rhythm and relaxation.

As you progress up the pyramid I will discuss and demonstrate the equipment that I prefer and am comfortable with. I am especially fond of my choice of bits and training techniques to transition a horse to a full spade bit. But again, that is my preference and it is your personal choice as you gain the knowledge to make the right equipment decisions, whatever they might be.

Now it's time to move to the final section of Foundations where I will give you directions on how to approach and progress up the training and riding pyramid.

Moving Up the Pyramid

Now that you have made it through the Foundations section of the program you should have a good grasp of the fundamentals that will help you and your horse succeed. And just as importantly, you now have a good start on learning the language of the horse.

Now you are probably asking yourself what your options are for moving up our training and riding pyramid to whatever level meets your personal situation. The best place to start is to visit our website at HorseSensible.com. Here you can find schedules for upcoming clinics and schools at our facility in Gilbert, Arizona. Also, when you purchase one of our Just Right Geldings, or take advantage of our Horse Training Services, you are able to attend a private clinic with Dave.

For those of you unable to take advantage of a hands-on clinic, you can utilize the learning resources on our site, which include training videos as well as articles and blogs written by Dave.

Whatever option you may choose, we invite you to become a member of our community of horse enthusiasts that have a common interest in bettering their horsemanship, and doing so in a safe and horse-friendly fashion. Since our learning options change occasionally, please visit our site on a regular basis. The following is a description of what we currently offer.

Group Clinics:

We offer several options to fit your busy schedule. Our Summer Nights Clinics run through the summer and are offered in the evenings during the week. Our fall, winter, and spring clinics are offered on weekends.

Private Clinics:

These clinics are offered by appointment and can be one-on-one, or with your group of friends. The subject matter is up to you, as we offer all levels of the program as well as other topics that can be tailored to meet your needs.

Schools:

Once a year we offer our ultimate cowboy vacation. It's an all-inclusive week-long stay at Dave's ranch where we mix hands-on clinics with fun activities like a cattle drive, seminars with specialty trainers, and many other fun activities. This is a special vacation that you will never forget, and a great way to learn Dave's program.

Just Right Geldings For Sale:

When you purchase a Just Right Gelding, we offer a free private clinic with Dave. This is usually a one-on-one session with Dave over the weekend. Dave covers what you need to know to be successful with your horse.

Horse Training Services:

Dave occasionally takes in outside horses for training. When the horse is ready to go, we also offer a free private clinic with Dave. You will learn what you need to know to be successful with your horse when you get home.

Website Training Videos:

We are gradually building our free video library to include short clips of each lesson of the Pyramid, as well as covering popular subjects such as problem solving and tips on the little things that count. Over time, we hope

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to offer you a video library that will be easy to view and helpful in learning our program.

Website Articles and Blogs:

Dave writes a monthly blog, newsletter, and other articles that are available on our website. These are a great resource for learning the program and improving your horsemanship.

Facebook:

We also post on our Facebook page, so follow Dave's daily posts describing highlights of his training for that day. Dave talks about the lessons he covered on a particular horse, the how-to's and some pointers on how to be successful. It is a short read and a great way to follow and learn our program.

Wishing You and Your Horse the Best

JUST DO IT

