

Understanding the Horse

THE EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, AND PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE HORSE

The emotional, mental, and physical aspects of each horse you come into contact with will be the most important information you have to successfully train that horse. You must evaluate each of these aspects carefully and apply each training exercise based on the horse's unique combination of these characteristics. The more time you take to understand how your horse reacts, thinks, and moves, the more successful you will be with his training and your relationship.

Let's look at each aspect and how it relates to training your horse.

The Emotional Aspect

I want to first talk about a horse's emotional makeup. Emotional control is my favorite topic for two reasons. First, it is one of the most important facets of horsemanship that every rider or handler must understand thoroughly. Second, I believe it is also one of the least understood areas within horsemanship, with very few trainers and clinicians focusing much (if at all) on it.

My career as a horseman grew out of struggles with emotional control issues I was having with my own horse, Tennyson. Tennyson is a very emotionally "high" horse, meaning he is extremely fearful, and only through countless training exercises did I begin to understand the importance of emotional control and the emotional aspect of the horse. My interest in this topic remains strong to this day. The challenges in this area led to my becoming a specialist in reschooling problem horses—something that less than 10 percent of working horse trainers do. Working with problem horses is all about mastering emotional control.



As an emotionally high horse, Tennyson requires consistent maintenance with emotional control exercises. Some days you would never guess he has crossed tarps thousands of times before. Here is a classic example of one of his "Hey, what is that thing?" kind of days.



Through subtle pressure and release cues, I allow him to increase his comfort level of the scary object. My body positioning remains very relaxed so as not to add fuel to his tension.



Always allow horses to sniff an object they are apprehensive about before asking them to cross over it.



Regular emotional control exercises help raise and lower the emotional level under controlled conditions, while reinforcing training cues. This gives you a huge safety edge when something occurs that causes your horse to become fearful.

So, what is emotional control? Emotional control is working with and crafting cues around the horse's own flight mechanism—her natural survival instinct. Horses are prey animals. Evolution has bred them to flee when they get scared. When I talk about horses' emotional level, I am referring to how intensely they react to fear and how fearful they are. Every horse has an emotional level—no exceptions. However, a combination of personality, breeding, maturity, and (maybe) trauma will determine an individual horse's particular emotional level.

I use a scale of one to ten to assess a horse's emotional level. A score of one would be for the most laid-back, nonfearful horse you can imagine; a ten might be for a horse who bolts when a good stiff wind blows. If you have a horse who's good-natured and of good breeding, he can be a two naturally. However, there are plenty of high-strung horses with extremely strong flight mechanisms who seem to score a twelve. I've had more than a few of them come through my training facility.

A low emotional level does not equal a "good" horse nor does a high number equal a "bad" horse. The measurements tell us what we need to do to have a safe and responsive partner. Differing emotional levels usually mean a different *application* of the training principles.

It's critical to address the emotional level of the horse and to achieve emotional control for safety's sake. Understanding and controlling your horse's emotional level will help you achieve maximum performance.

The safety issue should be obvious. You must have every ounce of control available to give you an edge if your horse reacts to fear by bolting, bucking, rearing, crow hopping, etc. Working your horse regularly with emotional control exercises, commonly known as despooning or sacking out, can save your life by having your horse listen and respond when you need her to.

Concerning competitive performance, the issue is very simple. Any horse experiencing fear and anxiety is not supple and not performing at her best. Fear makes horses stiff and tense throughout the entire body, which interferes with performance no matter what discipline you ride.

So, as mentioned previously, the main ingredients that determine the emotional level of the horse are breeding, maturity, possibly trauma, and personality.

Breeding is a tough issue. Plenty of breeders bring horses into this world who may be physically sound but are emotional wrecks. You cannot, of course, change their breeding (other than being a skilled and cautious breeder in advance); you can only work with what the horse has already.

Maturity is typically a matter of age and all the experiences that come with having lived life longer. Just like humans, as horses get older they are more likely to develop a "been there, done that" attitude and to become more complacent and less fearful.



Owning an emotional horse is not a bad thing. Tennyson's high emotional level also promotes his tendency to be extremely light and responsive.

Trauma is another tough situation. Often, people have a horse who experienced a traumatic event that they know nothing about. We can clearly observe that the horse is extremely fearful of specific objects or situations, but we may not know that the horse was abused in the past or was in a bad accident.

But the most interesting factor of a horse's emotional level is her personality type, as you'll see later in this chapter. The emotional level is tied to the horse's responsiveness to training. This is another good reason to understand the horse's emotional aspect. You have probably heard horses referred to as cold-blooded or hot-blooded. "Cold-blooded" is often used to describe breeds such as draft horses, mules, and Icelandic horses (to name just a few). These are animals who usually have lower fear levels. If we look at how evolution has contributed to the emotional development, we can see that draft horses are very large and predators are less likely to attack them. Mules, however, inherit the fight (rather than flight) instinct from their donkey side. The donkey's ability to see all its feet at the same time has made kicking a very effective defense. Standard and mammoth donkeys are frequently used for livestock predator control for very good reason. They can be quite aggressive with predators and have incredible aim and power. Icelandic horses have been living largely without natural predators other than man, being isolated by the harsh geography. Icelandic horses have lower emotional levels because they have not been prey animals.



The only rule: there's always an exception to the rule. Here Charles works with Ruby, an extremely emotional Belgian draft horse. Her owner acquired this 2,200-pound mare as an adult horse and her extreme fearfulness has made it difficult to work with her. Charles is introducing her to water for the first time so that she can be bathed. In this exercise he is only releasing the pressure (the water) when she calms or "gives" for even a second.



A typical example of a cold-blooded breed. This Icelandic horse has just encountered a tarp for the first time. However, within a matter of minutes, the horse is completely complacent about being covered by it.

This is not to say there are not exceptions. Just like we can have a very spooky Clydesdale, we can also have a very complacent Arab. But in general, many breeds have tendencies toward low, medium, or high emotional levels. The higher emotional levels of the Arab and the Thoroughbred also make them frequently sought after for high-energy events. Likewise, the quarter horse is considered a great all-around horse due to a mid-range emotional level that provides a nice balance as a working animal.

So how does the emotional level work in conjunction with how responsive the horse may be to training? Emotionally high horses are usually more responsive and ultimately it can be much easier to get them to be very light. The Icelandic horse shown on the previous page has very low fear levels but has required more training time on giving to pressure than most horses. He has been especially resistant about learning to give to the bit, meaning to be very soft and responsive when anyone picks up the rein to make contact with the bit in his mouth. His lower emotional level makes him more resistant to pressure, which means more work on getting him to be more responsive. We will be talking about why the emotional level determines how you should apply foundation training throughout this book. For now, keep in mind that the emotional level is a characteristic we use to assess the best application of the training exercises and principles.

The Mental Aspect

While I believe that the emotional level is the least emphasized characteristic in many training programs, the mental aspect is very important also. The mental aspect is the horse's capacity for *focus*, that is, her ability to learn the lessons we teach, and her willingness to pay attention. No matter how calm a horse might be, if she is not focused or interested, then the training lesson will not be a success.

We do foundation training exercises to *keep* the horse focused on us. One of the cardinal rules at my training facility is that you never just hop on your horse to ride. People are often amazed that we all spend anywhere from two minutes to thirty minutes doing foundation "groundwork" exercises before every ride. "But why?" they ask. "These seem to be the best-trained horses around!"

Groundwork is not about refreshing the horse on training cues or physically warming the horse up, though those *are* accomplished as side benefits. Instead, it is a mental check-in with the horse before you climb into the saddle and is the most important thing you can do to have a safe and successful ride. Many horses need only a few minutes. These exercises get the horse mentally focused on us and on what we are asking. They allow us to gauge where the horse's emotional level may be for the day (which can be different day to day),



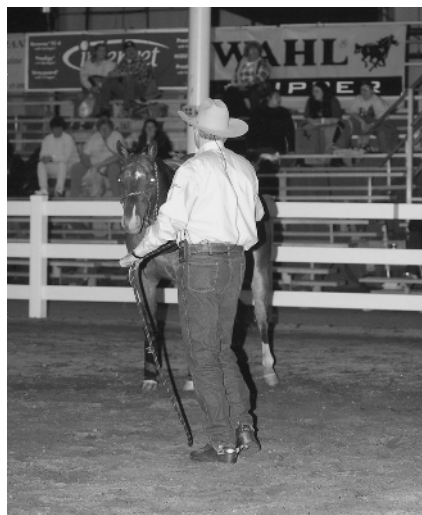
This photo series captures well the benefits of foundation training exercises for working with the emotional and mental aspects of the horse. Charles is working with a horse whom he has just met in a clinic. The horse already had emotional issues and the strange environment is making him even more nervous and mentally distracted. As can be seen, the horse is very stiff and resistant and wants nothing to do with Charles.



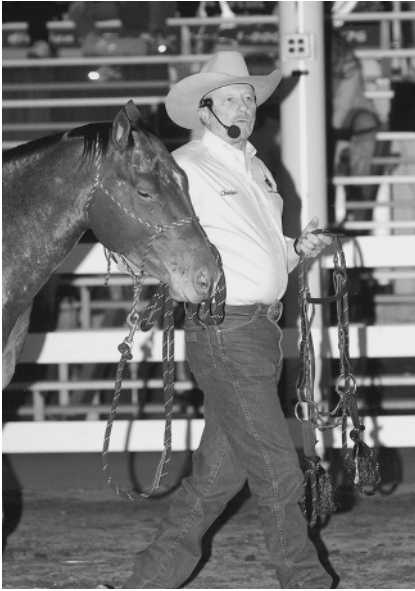
Fear and resistance are readily apparent in these first several pictures.



Charles continues to work on simple change of direction and go-forward line work.



The first sign the horse is relaxing and focusing on Charles: he has begun to lick his lips and is looking at Charles when asked to halt.



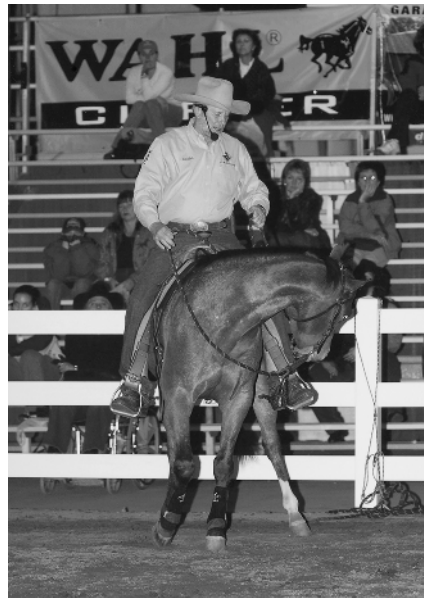
The horse is now mentally joined up with Charles and has become a willing student.



The horse is now attentive and light on the ground.



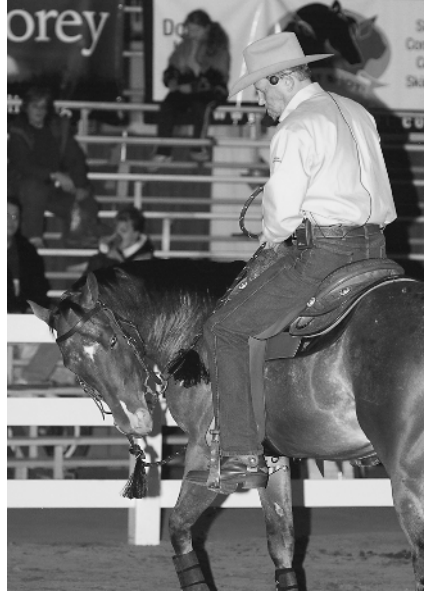
Charles moves into the saddle and begins to work on giving to the bit and yielding.



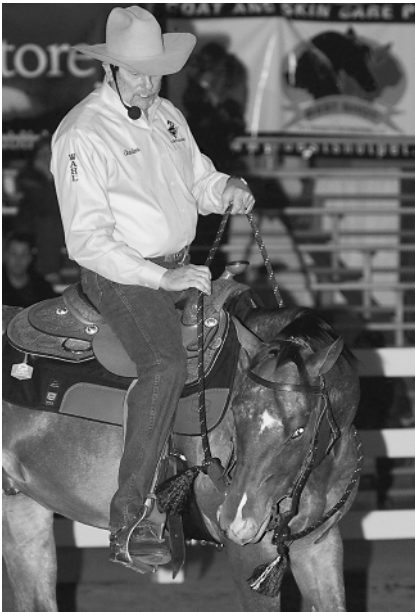
The foundation exercises continue to lower the horse's emotional level and keep him focused on Charles.



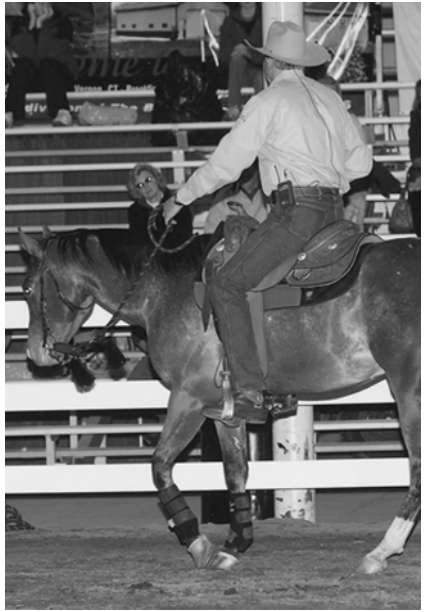
Within a short time the horse is bending and giving well . . .



. . . and just continues to soften.



The horse is now yielding as soon as Charles picks up the weight of the rein.



In about an hour, the horse is relaxed, attentive, and responsive under saddle.

and give us the chance to assess if the horse is mentally ready to ride. If not, we can do more groundwork, which gives us 70 to 80 percent carryover into the saddle. This means the physical, mental, and emotional aspects we have been tuning from the ground use very similar cues to what we want to be doing under saddle. The groundwork exercises remind the horse that we are controlling her feet, which controls her space and direction, which means we are the horse's leader. That translates into respect, and we are unlikely to have problems with a horse who respects us.

As with people, there are some horses who are just plain smarter than others. Because one horse learns faster, you may have to do more repetitions with one horse than another, even if both are paying attention to you. It can be frustrating if your horse isn't as bright as you would like and you therefore need to take more time training her. Likewise, having a very smart horse if you're a novice can be disastrous. I know plenty of people who prefer the extra repetitions required for the "dunce-cap" horse over being outsmarted. It can be a humbling experience when you discover that your horse has trained you instead of the other way around, which can happen easily to beginning riders who may not recognize when a horse is working them. A common example of this is at the mounting block. A smart horse learns quickly that she can avoid being ridden by walking away from the mounting block when a rider does not know how to respond appropriately.

But no matter how many repetitions and exercises your horse needs, it all comes down to controlling her direction, movement, and emotional level. Once you successfully capture her mind and control her feet, you have become her herd boss. From that point, you are achieving respect, trust, and even love. Don't kid yourself. Horses will not love you because you brush them and bring them carrots. In the horse world, respect equals love. If you are really seeking a close, loving relationship with your horse, become her leader. That's a partnership the horse understands and thrives on.

The Physical Aspect

What initially draws most people to a particular horse are her physical qualities. These include the horse's natural conformation, coloring, and beauty, as well her physical conditioning. While there are excellent reasons to buy a horse for her physical conformation and overall soundness, many people buy a horse because they like how she looks. I love the old-time cowboy saying "My favorite color horse is gentle."

Countless clients have come to me with horses who were not appropriate for their skill or discipline. They purchased the horse on an emotional decision, making a personal connection with the horse that was largely based on how the horse looked. For example, I have clients who want only paints or black horses; others want only a specific breed. Many people want horses that are a certain height or exact age. The list goes on and on. The biases people have based on physical attributes alone are astounding.

While the horse's physical aspect is critical to a good buying decision, we should decide based on actual need rather than what we *imagine* our ideal horse is.

Any horse can be taught any discipline. However, the conformation—how the horse is put together—makes an *enormous* difference in her ability to



Allison was the first one to admit she fell in love with the looks of her first horse more than anything. "He was one of the most lovely palominos I have ever seen. But if I only knew then what I know now about evaluating the suitability of a horse! Yes, he was and is a truly beautiful animal. But I ended up in the hospital because we were not a good match for each other."

perform. Those differences may distinguish between a great 4H horse and an Olympic champion. For example, the conformation of a cutting horse versus a dressage horse is very different. These disciplines require very different physical attributes. A gymnast's body is different from that of a basketball player, and, likewise, horses with different body types are suited to different activities.

Prior to purchasing a horse, it is important to consider what your goals are and then buy a horse that is physically suited for those goals. Or better yet, physically, mentally, *and* emotionally suited for what you want to do.

As part of discussing a horse's physical qualities, we should also talk about conditioning. The horse must be at the right level of athletic conditioning to maximize performance. The horse must strengthen all the muscles and tendons and be aerobically fit through a comprehensive exercise program. The great thing about foundation training is that many of the exercises, when done correctly, can make significant changes in conformation and help a horse reach her maximum physical potential. I am able to consistently improve a horse's performance as much as 25 to 30 percent through my foundation training exercises, despite limitations in the horse's natural conformation.

For example, a mare whom I have worked with quite a bit, Sierra, is very long-backed. From extensive foundation training, Sierra is now extremely supple and conditioned and can make quick, catty reining and cutting moves just like many short-backed horses.



Different conformations naturally lend themselves better to different disciplines, but foundation training can often help compensate for physical limitations. Sierra executes a few ranch horse moves.



Charles uses foundation exercises to enhance the correctness of movements of this Dressage horse.



In addition to being applicable to any riding discipline, foundation training is useful for any breed of horse. This gaited pony has greatly improved the movement and responsiveness of all five of his natural gaits.

HORSE PERSONALITIES

As humans, we love to connect with animals. We find and strengthen these connections through linking our personalities to theirs. And I can assure you that horses *do* have personalities. These personality types determine the natural pecking order within a herd and they *should* affect how you interact with your horse in becoming her leader. Horses cannot change their personality types. What you see is what you get. Humans, however, do have the ability to adjust how we interact with others. So once you understand the personality your horse has, you are in a good position to adjust (as needed) your personal style with the horse to achieve the relationship you want.

I believe that there are seven primary horse personalities: compliant, indifferent, bully, timid, nervous Nellie, lethargic, and way too smart.

Compliant. This is the horse that most of us want (or should have) and probably makes up less than 5 percent of all horses. This is the horse with the mind and attitude that says, “I don’t care, whatever you want to do, just let me know and I’m happy to oblige.” The compliant horse gives easily to pressure and has a natural emotional level usually around a two or three. The handler or rider for a compliant horse could be a youngster or a senior citizen. This is a very forgiving animal, easy to train with very low fear levels.

Bully. The bully is extremely pushy. She will have no problem walking into others’ space and doesn’t care about anything. She has no respect for humans and often little for other horses. This horse requires a very confident handler or rider. Communication must be in black and white when working with the bully horse. And, it is very important to note, if we offer too much pressure on the bully during training, we can actually get a reverse effect: the bully becomes timid and fearful.

Indifferent. This horse is aloof and not social. Once you capture her mind you may well become her best friend, but this usually takes a considerable amount of time and she will never be a true “people horse.” With an indifferent horse, the handler or rider must be confident, insightful, and very consistent. It is hard to get the attention and the focus of an indifferent horse. However, once the connection is made, this horse can actually become very nice.

Timid. The timid horse usually seems quiet on the outside, but he will fall apart under pressure. When working with the timid horse, the demeanor of the rider or handler must be very relaxed and quiet. We will need to put pressure on such horses to raise their emotional level, but not so much that

they “blow up.” Our objective is to instill confidence in them and to make them feel secure in the arena and on the trail.

Nervous Nellie. This horse differs from the timid horse in that she is just nervous about everything. This horse looks at everything. She has confidence to a degree but is also concerned about everything happening around her. The nervous Nellie is very likely to bolt if you put too much pressure on her, or if you ask her to do things too soon. The demeanor of the handler or rider needs to be relaxed, but you do not skirt around issues with this horse type. An assertive person may need to tone it down a bit (in body language and tone of voice), but you do not want to cater to this behavior. This horse’s emotional level must be worked frequently and with greater intensity.

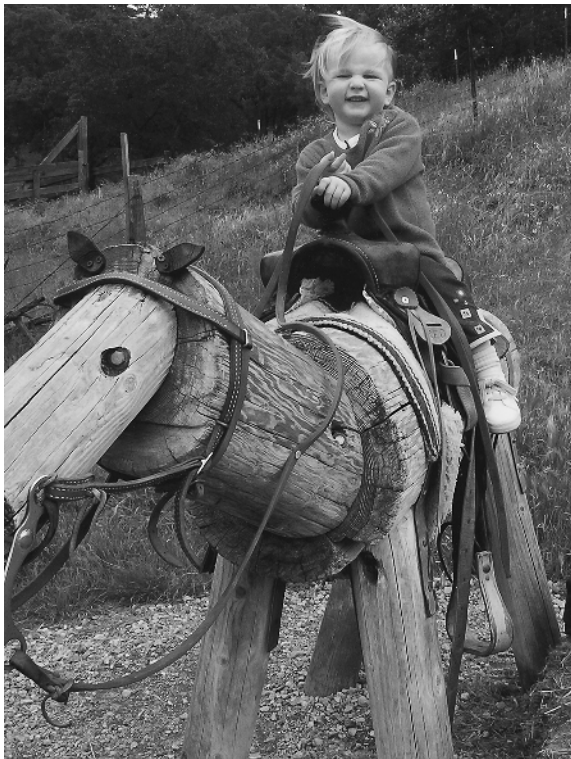
Lethargic. There are actually two categories of lethargic horses. There are those who are cold-blooded with little natural life or energy. You can achieve an increase in energy and forwardness, but it takes work. These are not good horses for the novice, who often does not follow through with the forward cue. If not properly addressed through foundation training, this horse’s attitude will become: “If you make me go forward, I will kick or buck.” If a good work ethic is not firmly trained into them, they can get nasty.

The other variety of lethargic horse is what I call a “sleeper horse.” Beginning riders buy these horses all the time. Super calm and relaxed, the sleeper is fine poking along and appears to be a compliant horse. But what you discover is that in the past, this horse simply never had anything asked of her before. She has never really been required to work and as soon as you start asking her with energy, looking for good forward impulsion, you end up with a real Jekyll and Hyde situation. This horse has found she has a lot of energy and was actually a forward horse, but before she was never asked or motivated to use that energy. The sleeper horse can develop a real attitude. She won’t want to work, since she has been trained in the past not to want to work. This can be overcome, but again, while she appeared to be a good beginner’s horse, the reality is that a confident trainer with the right timing and feel is needed to get the horse back to its natural forwardness minus the attitude.

Of these two lethargic horses, the first horse is “naturally” not forward; it was not born with a strong “go forward button.” This comes back again to a lesser flight instinct and sometimes just lower energy or impulsion—just as with people. The sleeper horse, though, is manmade and is the result of poor training and expectations.

Way too smart. We all want an intelligent horse, but if you are a beginner, you really do not want a truly smart horse. It's not that they cannot perform; the problem is that they find the holes in *your* training rather than you finding the holes in theirs! They are not very forgiving when you are unclear on signals and cues, and they have an uncanny knack for training their people rather than the other way around. For example, they learn quickly that when they do something that scares you, you may back off or cease asking for work. Next thing you know, they are doing that behavior all the time when you are around. It takes a lot of confidence and exceptional timing to make a really smart horse into your dream horse.

Of course, most horses are made up of a combination of elements of these personality types. The important thing is to evaluate and recognize your horse's personality characteristics so that you can most effectively work on her emotional and mental aspects. That is what all of this comes down to: *understanding how your horse acts, so that you know how to apply the training principles.*



The only truly bombproof horse!

Our talk about horse personalities would not be complete without mentioning the B word. That is, *bombproof*.

What is the most requested type of horse? A bombproof horse. Between parents looking for a safe mount for their kids and the huge influx of adults who discover or return to riding later in life (and discover they don't bounce so well as grown-ups), thousands of people each year search far and wide for the legendary bombproof horse.

Clients ask me all the time to find one of these elusive animals. I will tell you the same thing I tell them: there are no truly bombproof horses. There are very complacent horses with naturally low fear levels, and those who have had very solid foundation training added to that natural disposition will be the closest thing to bombproof you will find—especially if they are older horses with solid maturity and life experience to season them further. But every horse in the world has the potential to react negatively to something. And despite the best disposition and training, there is always the chance that the flight instinct will override all else. Riding and handling horses is inherently dangerous. Ultimate Foundation Training will greatly reduce the danger by significantly increasing the horse's respect, confidence, and responsiveness . . . but there is always some risk. Accepting that risk is part of horsemanship should provide you the best motivation for training your horse.

CONDITIONED RESPONSE

No matter what your horse's individual emotional, mental, or physical aspects are like and no matter which personality traits she displays, *conditioned response* is the fundamental tool of the horse trainer.

Conditioned response is the association of a natural behavior (say, a whoa or halt) with an artificial cue (pressure on the lead rope). A *natural behavior* is something that the horse does naturally in response to a cue. For example, a dog rustles through a hedge nearby, startling our horse. The horse shies and moves away. The rustling noise is the cue; the shying is the horse's natural response to that cue—no one had to teach the horse to respond in this way. It's just the nature of a horse. We can think of a cue like the stimulus for the response we want. Over time, the foundation training program establishes a comprehensive set of cues for each of the behaviors we want. Some trainers call these buttons. We have a stop cue, a go-forward cue, a backing cue, a side pass cue, and so on. We will use conditioned response to create the sets of performance behaviors we want to a set of specific cues.

What happens when we halter a horse who isn't halter-broken and put pressure on the lead rope? We will likely get a head toss or an attempt to break away

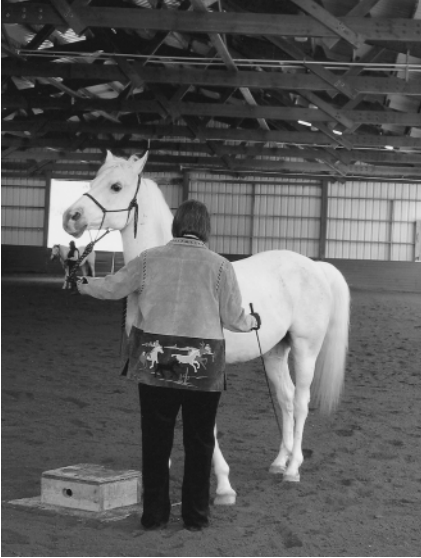
from the pressure. That's the horse's natural response to halter pressure. However, what we want is the horse to stop moving its feet when it feels pressure from the lead rope. So we must train the horse to associate the cue we issue (lead rope pressure) with performing a certain natural behavior (stopping his feet).

How does the horse associate our cue with her behavior? Reward. Reward is the key to this system. When the horse performs the behavior we want, we must tell the horse she made the correct association of cue and behavior by rewarding her. How do we reward the horse? *We discontinue the cue. We leave the horse alone.* From a horse's point of view, the best thing you can do is leave her alone. Releasing the pressure is a very powerful reward for the horse. This is how we say, "Yes, that was right!" to our horses. After a number of repetitions, the horse begins to associate the cue with the behavior that made us leave her alone. When we issue the cue again the horse will perform the behavior that made us stop cueing.

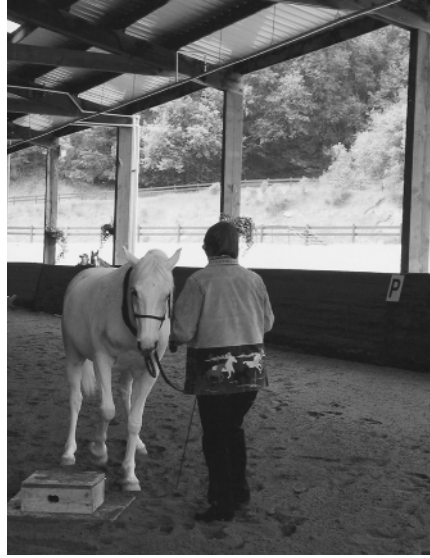
To teach a horse the meaning of a cue, we start with a cue and a behavior she can easily associate. We use the natural behaviors of moving forward and stopping. Let's say we want to teach a horse from the ground to go forward at the sound of a kiss. We kiss while urging the horse to go forward with the wave of a hand or hat, the toss of a lariat towards the horse's rear, or the tap of a whip on her hip. A kiss by itself will not usually motivate a horse to move, but the other actions usually will. When the horse responds with even just one step at first, we reward by stopping the cue. After a number of repetitions of the kiss followed by the reward when she moves forward, the horse begins to associate our physical movement (the cue) with moving forward. As we continue the lesson, the horse will eventually associate just the kiss with moving forward. When the horse can do this 100 percent of the time, without thinking, the horse has developed a conditioned response to the kiss.

Success of the cue-reward system (also referred to as pressure-release) depends on the trainer's accurate timing and consistency in delivering the reward, especially when teaching new cues. The behavior rewarded is the behavior we'll get. We must deliver the reward as soon as the horse attempts the behavior we seek. Letting up on the pressure before the horse moves tells her that whatever she was doing when we stopped the cue was what we wanted. The horse will repeat the wrong behavior when we cue her again. Conversely, if the horse moves and we don't stop the cue, she can't make an association between the cue and the behavior we want. The horse doesn't know that she has done what we wanted. We've missed an opportunity to reward the desired behavior.

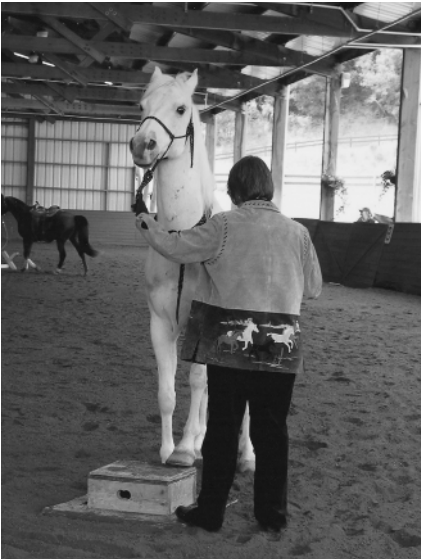
Repetitions are important, but there must also be consistency in the training. Whatever your standards are, they must be consistent and you cannot accept anything less. With pressure-and-release training, don't release the pressure until



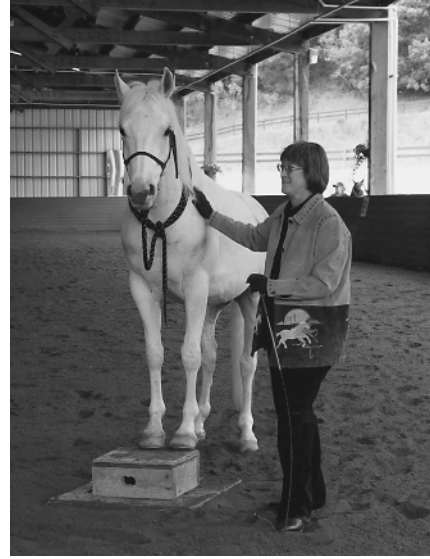
Karen's goal in this exercise is to create a conditioned response in which she can get Julian, an extremely nervous Nellie, to step on the block 100 percent of the time that she asks for it.



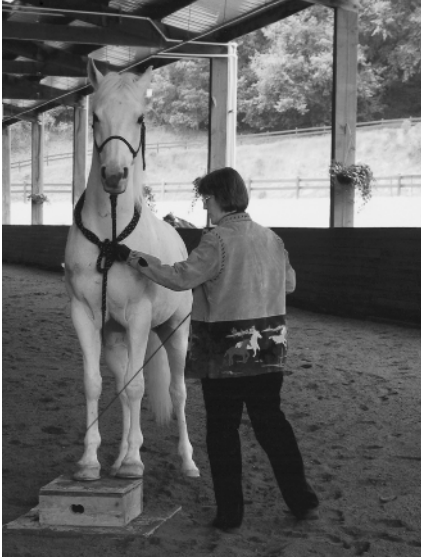
Because Julian is a very fearful horse and looks to Karen for confidence, she works very slowly with him, asking for small steps only.



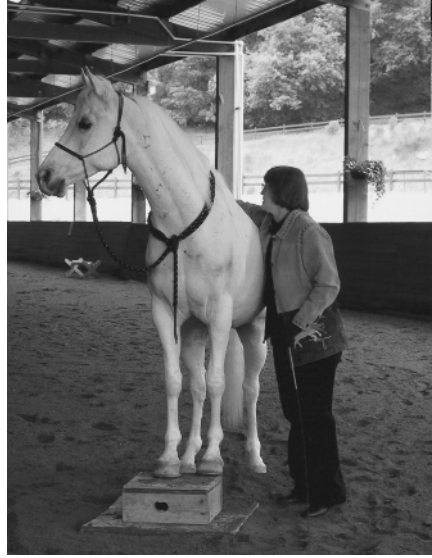
Once she can get his feet on the block, it's time to release and give him a break to reward him. Then she can ask for the cue again to step on the block.



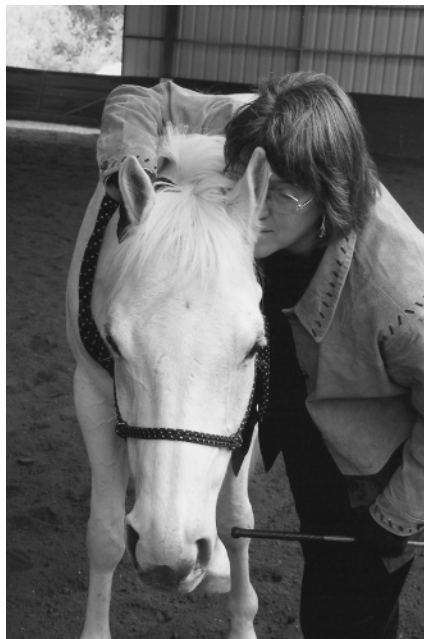
As Julian begins to understand the lesson and relax, Karen raises the expectations by asking for both front feet to step up and to stand there for a brief moment.



Once again, Julian performed the desired behavior so Karen releases the block and allows him to step backward off the block (which represents pressure to Julian) to reward him.



By the end of the lesson, Julian is consistently putting both feet on the block and remaining on it in a very relaxed manner.



"Good job, Julian!"

the horse has met your standards every time. It takes hundreds of repetitions for a horse to learn a cue. Counting the repetitions is necessary. There is knowledge in counting. As you start counting, you'll see a pattern in the horse's learning. It also gives you a goal to work toward and helps you concentrate. You can't kinda count. If you have trouble counting, you need to recognize that you will have trouble concentrating on what you're trying to teach your horse.

The horse needs to focus her mind on us for optimum results. In order for the horse to have her mind engaged, we must first have *our* minds engaged. We have to know exactly what we are asking the horse to do—I mean *exactly* what the exercise or response to a cue looks like. If we don't, then we are teaching the horse incorrectly. If there are any doubts or uncertainty, it will show and there will be holes in the training.

We have achieved a conditioned response when our horse gives us the desired behavior in response to our cue every time. The number of repetitions it takes to achieve a conditioned response depends on the horse's personality, your consistency in delivering the cue *and* the reward, and possibly any baggage the horse may be carrying from earlier training. It may be fifty repetitions; it may be a thousand. But the horse is a reflection of us in these exercises, so if we get it, chances are the horse will too. And for the horse to be focused, we must be focused.

TEN SECRETS EVERY HORSE WANTS HIS OWNER TO KNOW

If only I had a nickel for every time I've heard someone say, "I wish my horse could talk to me." These folks are not saying this because they want to have a personal conversation with their horse, but to express their frustration that a training session is not going well. If only their horse could help them understand why the lesson is not working.

For those of us who have worked with horses a long time, we know that in fact they do communicate quite well once you learn their language. Learning their language is easy once you learn these ten secrets, which are really just the basic principles of effective equine/human interaction.

1. **Follow-through.** If you do not follow through every time you ask something of your horse, she will never understand what you are asking.
2. **Control the horse's space.** You control a horse's space by controlling her mind. You control her mind by controlling her feet, which can be done both on the ground and in the saddle.

3. **Be consistent.** You have to ask for a cue the same way every single time. Do not expect the horse to understand and adjust to variations. You have to be consistent 100 percent of the time if you expect the horse to be also.
4. **Have patience.** You can be doing all of the above perfectly, but horses do not wear a watch. Depending on a horse's personality and past experiences, it will take as long as it takes for her to do what you are asking. You cannot allow yourself the luxury of having a short fuse and getting frustrated or even angry.
5. **Be persistent.** If you do not persevere, you will not succeed. If I had to tell people one reason and only one reason why I have been successful as a horse trainer, I would tell them it's because I am tenacious. I simply do not give up and neither must you.
6. **Use pressure judiciously.** You must truly understand the use of pressure—how much to use and what the different forms of pressure can take. For example, pressure can be direct physical contact, like a halter, lead line, or tapping with a crop on the hip; or it can be indirect contact like waving a hand in the air or swinging a rope. Your job is to understand the *least* form of pressure you can apply to your horse that still makes her react.
7. **Release appropriately.** You must understand when to release. Horses learn by when and what we release on. If you ask for a go forward and are consistent, patient, and apply pressure correctly but then you release before she has taken a step, you are guaranteed next time not to get forward movement. Pressure represents anything that is uncomfortable, so all the horse cares about is what it takes to make it stop. So whatever the horse is doing when you release, that is what she learned to do to make the pressure stop.
8. **It's never, ever the horse's fault!** If we use human language to communicate with the horse, then there will be no communication. However, if we invest in learning the horse's language, then we start a relationship and earn the respect and partnership we are seeking. But whatever develops, you are the leader with your horse, so never blame the horse.
9. **Have a great work ethic.** You do not succeed at anything, especially working with horses, without a strong work ethic. All of the above principles require dedication, effort, and tremendous commitment.

- 10. Have fun!** Make sure you are having fun as you work with your horse. It's true that in the beginning, it is a lot of work. But as you both progress, it should become very enjoyable as you develop that partnership, and your horse really respects you, wants to be with you, and displays a real willingness to please.

Let me end here by sharing a story with you about a lesson I learned that illustrates some of the principles discussed in this chapter. Some years ago I worked with a gray mare named Zodi. Now, this mare had one of the worst cinchiness problems I have ever seen, even to this day. Have you seen a horse with a cinching problem? Sometimes the horse starts getting agitated with only the saddle on her back. But more often than not, it's just when you reach down to start to tighten that cinch on the belly that she acts out. The horse can feel the cinch pressure and it makes some horses very fearful. Zodi was a classic example. She would rear up and go backward to try to get away from that cinch. She also had a severe bridling issue. When I went to put a bridle on her, she would whale her head back and forth so violently that I had to stay out of the way. She coldcocked my training partner, knocking her flat.

We had been working with Zodi a while and had not seen much progress. I really wanted to give up. I did not see the type of improvement I expected. The owner was persistent, though, and told me the mare was supposed to be nice and asked me to please keep working with her.

Well, just as people have very different learning curves, horses do too. A few weeks later we saw huge improvement. I was ready to call it a success, and then all of a sudden she digressed again. Once more I wanted to call it quits and the owner pleaded for another few weeks.

Well, sure enough, within the next few weeks, we broke through whatever emotional issue Zodi was dealing with concerning cinches and bridles. Not only that, but I saw her two years after she left us. For one of those two years she had been left out in pasture for breeding—a full year without saddling or bridling. Yet even two years after we had ended the training, she barely flinched when cinched up and beyond lowering her head quietly, had no response to bridling.

That lesson really struck home for me and has kept me working with horses whom many other trainers have given up on. Horses *do* have different learning curves and sometimes even just a few weeks can make all the difference in the world. But you have to be consistent, persistent, and patient—and do everything else that makes it clear to the horse what you are asking and why she should trust and respect you.

In the next section, we'll talk about how the principles outlined in this chapter apply to foundation training and developing your dream horse.