

Oct. 2007, Chilliwack, BC Jonathan Field Horsemanship

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The 6 Cs of Reading Horse Behaviour

- care
- control
- communication
- confidence
- competency
- challenge

Care: some people are careless

- **care is the #1 issue – feeding, cooling**
- people can get sore; when you get to a point called ‘halt’, you can’t help yourself
- ***Pony Club is a phenomenal system for care***

Control: sometimes you can’t get your horse to communicate with you because of the situation (e.g., you’re on a trail ride and all the other horses take off, so your horse wants to take off, too).

- people can be control freaks; this is not a good thing when you’re working with horses
- some people don’t want to take control:
 - o remember: the horse is a 1000 lb. bunny rabbit; don’t ask a horse to take control, as he just wants to run away
- don’t fight the very nature of the animal (herdbound); channel that

Communication: give the horse what *he* needs, not what you think he needs or what you need.

- mirror his energy, then re-direct
- horses get in synch to the most obvious or dominant force

Confidence: build your own confidence, but stretch your own elastic band; this stretches the horse’s elastic band

Competency: coordination. Practice. Rehearsal.

Challenge: raise the bar to/past your level of competency.

- If you raise too far above that, you run the risk of proving the Peter Principle (you will rise to your level of incompetence)
- **Resort to competency – practice**
- *Let go of the ego*

- Practice on your own feet (courses, dressage tests, patterns, etc.)
 - o *this checks to see whose competency is in question: yours or the horse's*
- we don't always challenge ourselves enough
- get out there; take a clinic (or whatever)

Be a good diagnostician.

- sometimes you can't find the forest for the trees
- find out which tree is in your way
- don't chop down or walk around all the trees
- behaviour is the fruit of the tree: go back to the root to go back to the seed
- what is your strategy to stop a behaviour?
- Break it down into bite-sized pieces
- **Stop at a different time** for *confidence* than you would in the name of *control*
- Don't shut down a behaviour: you haven't changed the root of the behaviour. It'll come back to bite you at the worst time. **Stop at the moment of heightened confidence.**
- Confidence is fear-based; aggression is a form of fear
- Lay blocks and increase the challenge; it takes time (three months) then spend more money
- **If a horse is afraid, they've got to be able to move.** Don't tie them up. Approach and retreat (if the horse is afraid of something). Acclimatize. Stop when you've had some kind of progress (horse shies 10' instead of 20'). Desensitize.
 - o *If you go too slow, you will bore them.*
 - Cannot change any thinking
 - o *If you go too fast you will scare them.*
 - You funnel in more fear
- **use the speed that you need**

Question: thin skinned thoroughbred, overly sensitive to brushing

- go to a place they like to be brushed (shoulder); feeling and timing need to change. *You can have the perfect feel and then end up holding it too long.* It's better to get them half clean but to leave them liking it.

A real horseman adjusts to the horse, and doesn't go through a bunch of horses until he finds one that adjusts to him.

Herdbound: establish patterns to help.

1. active approach: bring him away and work him until he feels in control with you. Come and go away from other horses.
2. What about when he can't see other horses? Without you: tie him up first with horses close together; increase distances. Go around the corner. Tie up to the horse trailer. Make this 'home'.
3. Move pens, change horse neighbours, be flexible

Pulling back: teach them to communicate to yield. There has to be a break point on the tie (doesn't believe is elastic ties). Horse learns by when pressure comes off; from the release.

- the fundamental reason that horses don't tie is that they don't lead
- wrap the lead shank around the post to start; don't tie it.
- Always tie to a post, never to a rail
- Tie the horse high and short; the head shouldn't be able to get below the knees.

Horse jiggling on a trail ride: he's herd bound. This is scrambled up thinking (on the horse's part). It's fruitless to fight when it's dangerous (e.g., you're on a trail ride and there's a 1000 foot drop on one side of the trail – don't choose this time to school your horse). Have that horse do more miles. Serpentine. When he relaxes, let him join the ride. When he's jiggling, the other horses are in control of yours – *you have no control*.

Lead changes: get access to the hind leg. Shift quarters to get the right lead.

EXERCISE: at walk, up centre line, shift quarters left and right. Find the horse's sweet spot – leave the horse alone. Correct at all other times. Most important:

- a) line
- b) speed
- c) flexion