

Principles Before Goals – How Interesting!



By Stephanie Burns, PhD

You would just about have to be walking around with a bucket over your head to not be aware that a large part of your *Parelli Natural Horse•Man•Ship* study is about learning, understanding, and applying a set of well-developed principles.

- Don't force the horse
- Use phases
- Don't just saddle your horse and get on
- Don't act like a predator
- Eyes, belly button, legs, reins
- Don't get mean or mad
- Always start at Phase 1
- Take the time it takes
- Have an attitude of justice

Need I go on! There are hundreds of these.

We cannot read a page, watch a video, or attend a clinic where these principles of Parelli Natural Horse•Man•Ship are not consistently and persistently expressed. As a Parelli student we either learn swiftly or slowly that these principles are at THE heart of your learning. They are NOT simple cliches to aid in our memory of them

or cheap pop-psychology quips as used by other trainers in all sorts of fields.

Behind each of Pat's principles is a rich definition and a rationale for its existence. Most importantly, it provides us with the way we should think and behave when we are with our horse. The principles ensure the preservation of the horse's dignity as well as ensuring our safety. As we advance through the *Parelli Savvy System* we come to fully realize that these principles provide the foundation upon which all other thoughts and behaviors rest.

There is one principle in particular I want to discuss: "Principles Before Goals." And, I would add, "and expectations." Until this principle is firmly a part of our thinking and behavior, our ability to apply every other principle is at risk.

The idea that principles should come before goals or expectations is not difficult to understand. However, for humans it can be most difficult to apply. Many humans, by nature, are highly goal-driven. Most formal programs of study are also goal-directed. The *Parelli Savvy System* is no exception. Most of us are striving to achieve the tasks set for us in the *Level* we're studying. That

is as it should be. But we must understand that when we have a goal or expectation in mind, our principles can take a back seat. Unfortunately, this most often occurs outside of our awareness.

For example, it is easy to understand the principle of "take the time it takes" but when it comes to the goal of having your horse jump over THAT log at THIS moment, and he just won't go, that principle can go right out the window — along with the principle of "don't force the horse," "don't get mean or mad," and a bunch of others!

Our goals cause us to be impatient, to be frustrated, and to compare ourselves and our horses to other people and their horses. Goals even cause us to compare our good *Circling Game* to our not-so-good *Sideways Game*, and to abandon the principles related to teaching our horse as we strive for a faster and better *Sideways Game*. Let's face it, we probably wouldn't be frustrated if we didn't have it in our minds that we were trying to get our horse to do something specific.

The worst part about all of this is that we abandon our principles without thinking.

We do it blindly and the day we realize we've been doing it, we feel sad and guilty. How many times this year have you apologized to your horse?

MAINTAINING YOUR PRINCIPLES

This is a difficult problem. Goals are important. Principles are important. But it is our principles that suffer UNTIL we experience a fundamental change in thinking about what is important in the time spent with our horses.

I would like to share with you two new behaviors I learned that have directly affected my ability to NOT lose sight of the principles taught in the *Parelli Savvy System*. Both of these I learned from Linda Parelli.

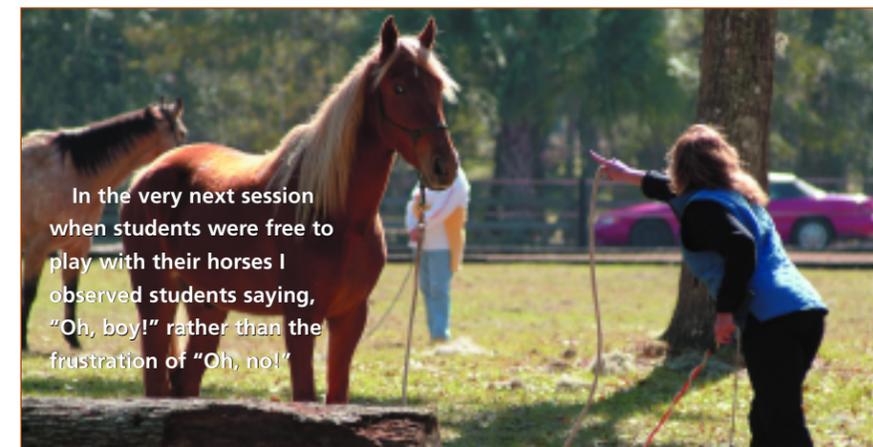
THE "HOW INTERESTING!" BEHAVIOR

While sitting in on Linda's *Level 3* class last summer there were times when what a student communicated to their horse was not what they got. For instance, a student might ask for a circle to the right at the trot and the horse bolted off exuberantly to the left. For some students this caused an immediate non-principled response.

Linda, observing the situation, grabbed the class's attention and suggested that when what we asked for is not what we got, we look at our horse and say, "How interesting!" while tilting our head and placing our forefinger on our chin. The result is fascinating. IF every time your horse does something other than what you believe you communicated, using this "How interesting!" behavior naturally and automatically CAUSES you to think BEFORE acting. It provides an opportunity to first consider what you did to CAUSE the response you got. The "How interesting!" behavior generates CURIOSITY in the human, which is a very potent state of mind for learning AND for teaching.

THE "OH, BOY!" BEHAVIOR

Just a few weeks ago in Florida I sat in on a *Level 1* class Linda was teaching. She was aware of the natural frustration that students can feel in *Level 1* when their horses are having difficulty learning what it is the students are trying to teach. Linda gave the class an idea. She told a story about how she seeks challenging horses because they allow her to continue to learn and improve her horsemanship skills. She



In the very next session when students were free to play with their horses I observed students saying, "Oh, boy!" rather than the frustration of "Oh, no!"

said, "There's nothing worse than a horse that can do everything you would want a horse to do! How boring!"

Linda suggested there would be a day soon when the students would be looking for things their horses couldn't do (a very novel thought for some students) and their response would be the same as it is for her: "Oh, boy!"

This new "Oh, boy!" behavior had an immediate impact on the class. In the very next session when students were free to play with their horses I observed students saying, "Oh, boy!" rather than the frustration of "Oh, no!" or "Oh, you little blighter!"

IN CLOSING...

The principles of natural horsemanship Pat developed are critically important to learn and apply. You can learn them quickly or frustratingly slow. This depends upon understanding the role they play in the whole of your journey as a Parelli student. I wish I'd come to see this a little sooner. Today I understand this very well and am quite happy to take what my horse Nugget gives me on that particular day. I know to never put my goals or expectations before Pat's principles. As a result our progress is exponentially faster than it had been in the past. We are both having more fun and learning more. How interesting!

If today you start looking at your horse's behavior through the lenses of "How interesting!" (head tilted and finger on chin) and "Oh, boy!," I promise you will see something very different in your horse as he looks back at you. You will see his TRY. You will see his CONFUSION. You may

even see him saying, "SURELY, YOU MUST BE JOKING!"

Whatever you see might well motivate you to put principles before your goals, to be the best teacher you can be to preserve the dignity of your horse, and to ensure you are safe. 🐾



Have you ever wondered why Linda Parelli is such an excellent student and instructor?

Enter Dr. Stephanie Burns...

Linda studied intensively with Stephanie in the early 80's, experiencing major breakthroughs in applying Stephanie's accelerated learning techniques to all aspects of her personal and professional life.

As a result of this, Linda and Pat are thrilled to announce the Parelli release of Stephanie's book, *Great Lies We Live By*.

Great Lies is now available at parelli.com* and is highly recommended reading for anyone wanting effective strategies for learning and managing educational information.

*Savvy Club members please call 1-800-642-3335 for your special member price of \$14.95. (Reg. \$19.95)

For more info on Stephanie, please visit www.stephanieburns.com

