



articles



Learning about human behaviour from natural horseman Pat Parelli

by Pat Parelli (and annotated by Dr. Stephanie A. Burns)

Introduction by Stephanie

Since I wrote this article I have had many experiences with Pat and Linda Parelli. I designed a learning support site for their self-study students (www.parellinet.com). To do that I had to be a student myself so I could write from the perspective of a student. That means I now have a horse and all the trappings. I am more convinced than ever that studying Pat Parelli's work will help you understand more about human behaviour in the contexts of learning and teaching than any other text I could recommend.

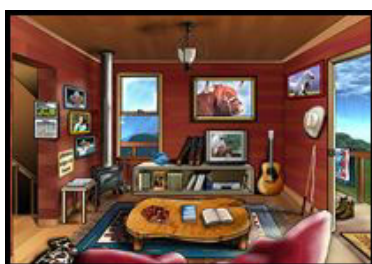
Here now is the article I wrote in 2000 which got the ball rolling.



Asking Nugget to back into his yard

I have had so many starts to this article! Everytime I get stuck I either watch a video tape of Pat working with a horse or communicating to a group of owners, or I read another piece of his writing - and there is stacks of it on my desk! Oh, that fires me up. Every line of Pat's resonates with the teacher in me. I think of what I am trying to teach to my own students in Training To Train. So I sit back down at the keyboard and try to express what I am seeing to motivate you to want to have a Parelli experience for yourself. His level of artistry in teaching is exquisite.

But, alas, I have failed time and time again. I suppose when something is expressed in a well articulated form it makes it impossible to recreate it in a different form. I keep hearing Pat's voice when I try to represent his work in my words. It has been a very frustrating experience.



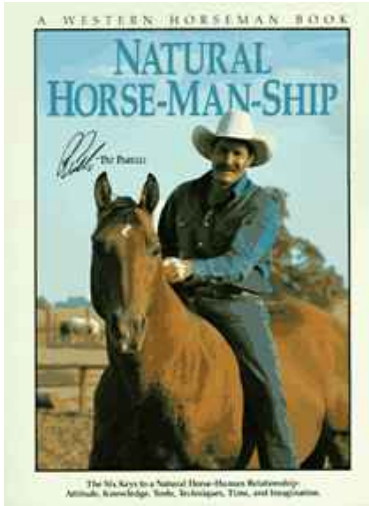
The inside of DB's cabin. The Parelli on-line learning support centre

will be able to 'see' what I 'see' when reading Pat's own words. Rather than try to tell you what I think Pat says, you can hear him for yourself in the following piece. You may think you are reading about horses and owners! I can promise you are also reading about human students/employees and their teachers, managers, coaches and trainers. It just a matter of translation from one context to another. And, it is a very easy translation to make.

I have no doubt you will find your experience of both being a student and a teacher in this article. I have annotated in the margin for those of you who have worked with me as a trainer. At the end of the article I provide you with information should you want further information on Pat's work.

For that reason I am going to assume that as trainers, teachers and managers who are good at what you do, you

Stephanie



The 8 principles of Natural Horse-Man-Ship

(excerpt from the book Natural Horse-Man-Ship)

by Pat Parelli

1. Horse-Man-Ship is natural

Horse-Man-Ship is three words linked together. It's a horse and a human going willingly together. Horse-Man-Ship is for horses as well as humans, and the horse comes first.

In this regard, it is important to understand that the horse is a prey animal, and that he is driven by three major instincts a) to be perceptive to danger, b) to fly from fear, and c) to be gregarious. He is a born coward, a born claustrophobic, and a born "full-throttle-aholic" by varying degrees.

By varying degrees means that some horses are more sensitive than others. For example, some are more cowardly than others, although they are all cowards to some degree. In the same sense, some are more claustrophobic than others. In other words, some can stand confinement or restraint better than others. "Full-throttle" means all out forward. "AholiC" is usually referred to as a person who can't help himself or who has an addiction to something. With regard to horses full-throttle-aholic means the horse reacts first and thinks second. He runs from fear at full speed, and only looks behind when he thinks he's safe.

In applying this to horses, let's use a typical scenario as an example. When a horse gets his foot caught in a fence, because he is a born coward and a born claustrophobic, he doesn't calmly think, "Oh, darn, my foot is caught" Instead, the horse panics. He doesn't think logically, and he automatically goes into full-throttle. He tries to escape his entrapment any way he can, even if he hurts himself in the process. This is usually the case unless the horse has been taught to stand still when his foot is caught. I'm not saying that all horses have these sensitivities to an extreme degree. Some are quieter and less panicky than others. They are all born with their own degree of sensitivity.

When someone buys a horse, he mistakenly thinks he owns the horse - heart, body, and soul - and that the animal should succumb to his wishes. A horse is an individual, not simply a possession. He has wants and needs, too. He wants to become comfortable, and as long as you can prove to him that you're not a predator, he'll be comfortable.

It is important to understand that the human is the horse's biological enemy; in other words, a predator. Most people get upset when their horses act like prey animals instead of partners. And most horses get upset when their humans act like predators instead of partners.

People who think like people (and not like horses) think that when a horse is following his instincts, he is being naughty. We need to understand that a horse is programmed by nature to act like a prey animal.

Horses are easily recognized as prey animals because of three distinct characteristics:

1. They smell like what they eat, which is grass.
2. Their eyes are set on the sides of their heads,

A student in an unfamiliar environment - such as a new learning environment is governed by three instincts:

a) to avoid physical, mental and emotional discomfort;

b) to maintain an optimal level of stimulation;

c) to protect his/her self-esteem

By varying degrees (dependent upon certain personality traits and past experiences some students are more sensitive than others.

When a human is doing a repetitive learning task, because he has a threshold for optimal stimulation he will experience boredom to one extend or another. He doesn't think - "Oh, darn, I am doing a repetitive task." - he instead begins to think of other more stimulating activities to engage in - none of which help him learn the task at hand.

Teachers who think like a

teacher (and not like a student) think that when a student is following his instincts, he is being disruptive in one extreme or lazy and apathetic in the other.

which means they have bilateral vision. This gives them great peripheral vision and the ability to see predators sneaking up behind them. But it also gives them the disadvantage of not having great depth perception.

3. As a prey animal, the horse is perceptive to danger, people, places, changes, and things; particularly dangerous people, places, changes, and things.

When Horse-Man-Ship happens, the human becomes half horse and the horse becomes half human. Our job as the horse's leader is to get him to be braver, less claustrophobic, and less of a full-throttle-aholic. In other words, for Natural Horse-Man-Ship to truly happen, the horse must want to become a Horse-Man first. He has to become braver, less fearful of tight places, and more willing to stand his ground rather than panic at what he perceives to be danger. And the human needs to become assertive enough to be viewed as the "alpha" member of the horse's society, rather than being viewed as a predator or a wimp.



What rituals have you, as a teacher or trainer, set up that are counter-productive to the process of learning?

What do you know about the value of keeping your students guessing?

2. Don't make assumptions

The word "assume" is made up of three little words: Ass, U, and Me. It is easy to assume and to teach the horse to assume. Don't assume today that your horse is going to wake up on the same side of the corral as he did yesterday, whether he was good, bad, or indifferent. A horse lives moment to moment. He wakes up on a different side of the corral each day. This is why it is important to have and to understand the ritual of pre-flight checks (a series of steps that are detailed later in this book).

On the other hand, teaching the horse not to assume is also significant. For example, if you were to ride your horse 3 days in a row in an arena and stopped everyday at the gate just before you got off, you would teach your horse to assume that when you got to the gate, it's time to stop. By the fourth day, the horse would take over and when you got to the gate, would probably stop and wait for you to get off. Instead of teaching him to assume when you are going to quit, teach him not to assume by varying the time and area in which you stop. Mixing it up will keep the horse guessing and not assuming.

Here's another example of teaching your horse to assume. If you went on a trail ride for 3 days in a row, rode out a mile or two, then turned around and trotted back home, on the fourth day your horse will start jiggling home. You will have taught your horse to assume that when you got to a predetermined distance, he is supposed to turn around and trot home. This is how he would make an Ass out of U and Me.

In order to obtain horsemanship through communication, we must learn not to assume.

3. Communication is mutual

Communication is two or more individuals sharing and understanding an idea. If I pat my leg and the dog comes, we've communicated. But I can talk to a post until I'm blue in the face, and I'm just talking. Communication is a mutual affair between two or more individuals.

How many teachers have you had in your past who could not 'hear' your communication - only to respond with "sit

down, shut up and listen"?

A good example of a horse trying to communicate with the human is when a rider kicks his horse to go, then pulls him to stop, and the horse opens his mouth. Instead of listening to the horse who is trying to say, "Your hands are too heavy and you're not communicating down to my feet," the rider ties the horse's mouth shut with a cavesson and says, "Shut up and do what you're told."



"The horse's body language tells you his attention is split. One ear is trained on what's in front of him, the other is cocked to his right and what's happening there. He's got his mind on two things at once."

Pat Parelli

Can you tell when your human student's attention is split?

**Every trainer (and parent) should learn this!
"It is up to you to cause"**

This reminds me of the lessons in Training To Train on "soft language", such as, "suggest", "notion", "might", "opportunity", "my thought on that is"

For communication to lead to behavioural change it must be:

**DIRECT
PERSONAL
CONSEQUENTIAL**

4. Horses and humans have responsibilities

If horsemanship is going to be a partnership, both the horse and the human have got to have some responsibilities. There are eight responsibilities: four for the horse and four for the human. (A detailed description of each responsibility is in Knowledge - An Overview.)

Four responsibilities of the horse:

1. Learn to act like a partner, not like a prey animal.
2. Don't change gaits.
3. Don't change directions.
4. Watch where he is going.

Four responsibilities of the human:

1. Learn to act like a partner, not like a predator.
2. Develop an independent seat.
3. Think like a horse.
4. Use the natural power of focus.

5. The attitude is justice

Your attitude toward your horse should be a just one. In other words, you should cause your ideas to be your horse's ideas, but understand what his ideas are first.

Then it's up to you to cause the undesirable things to be difficult and allow the desirable things to be easy. If the horse is doing something you don't want him to do, create a situation in which it's hard or uncomfortable for him to do those things and also one in which it's easy for him to do what you want him to do. It'll soon become his idea to do whatever is easiest.

I use the words "cause" and "allow" when it comes to creating situations for your horse. I don't use "make" or "let." The word "cause" is less commanding than "make" and "allow" is more respectful than "let." Some people "let" their horses do incorrect things, and then they get angry with them when they do. To correct the problem, they then try to "make" their horses do things. Some people by nature are makers. They're always mean when they ask their horses to do things.

Other people are beggars, always gentle when they ask. They just let the horses do anything they want.

You need to be assertive. Do something about the situation when it needs to be done. Assertive is somewhere between being aggressive and being a wimp. Be as firm as necessary without getting mean or mad; be as gentle as you can without being a sissy.

Trust that your horse will respond to what you ask but be ready to correct, no more one than the other.

Try to become a natural leader for that natural follower, the horse. You've got to be mentally, emotionally, and physically fit so you can be just at all times. You've got to have your act together. You have to become collected in the human sense.

The horse has three systems respect, impulsion and flexion. Everything I'm talking about so far has to do with getting the horse's respect so he will give you his impulsion, which is controlled forward energy. Then you learn how to keep him flexible in the mind and body.

The attitude is justice, and to be just, you have to be assertive, be a causer, and not a maker. You have to allow, and not let.

6) Body language is the universal language

Body language is universal. I've got it. You've got it. Horses have got it.

There are things a horse does to let us know what he's thinking. For example, when he puts his ears back, he's irritated. Watch out! If he's blinking he's thinking. If he licks his lips, he is probably digesting a thought; he understands and accepts the situation. If he's cocked a hind leg, he's relaxed; but if his ears are back and he lifts a hind foot, he's ready to kick. There are many postures that key us in to the horse's state of mind.

The body language of humans is just as important or more so. Most people don't key in to their own body language. The way they look at horses, their body posture, their actions, tells horses what they are thinking. You can easily misrepresent yourself to the horse through inappropriate body language. When some people approach their horses, their body language or posture makes them look aggressive or sneaky like they have the look of the lion. On the other hand, there are those people who have the look of the lamb. They're sheepish or submissive.

Other examples of misrepresentation are walking into the pasture just to say hello, but with a grain can in one hand and a halter behind your back. You look like you're intent on catching the horse, and the look on your face is strong and scary to the horse. This is where the predator needs to be aware of how he represents himself to the prey animal, the horse.

7) Horses teach riders and riders teach horses

This is such an important principle. Many good horsemen say that horses are their best teachers. There's a reason for this. For example, if you want to learn how to cut cattle, buy a trained cutting horse to learn from. He'll teach you about the sport and what it feels like to cut a cow so you can understand it better. Then, once you've got the feel, you can offer it to other horses you ride. If you already know how to cut, then buy a 2-year-old horse and help him along.

One of the more common fallacies is buying a young horse for a young

The "perceptions of the student matter" whether that perception is accurate or inaccurate - it will affect their response to your communication.

**Students teach teachers
Teachers teach students**



Linda Parelli

or green rider. An example is when parents buy their children young horses. So many times you hear about the parent who buys a 2- or 3-year-old horse for his youngster, thinking the two will grow up and learn together. That combination is usually a disaster. The horse needs to learn what he's expected to do from an experienced rider. The child needs to learn what it takes to cause a horse to move properly and also gain confidence from a steady mount. Green riders on green horses does not make sense. It can be a deadly combination.

On the other hand, it's important to learn from the horse who knows his job well. There are many things he can teach you, and then you can become a teacher of horses.

8. Principles, purpose, and time are the tools of teaching

Think about principles as being the horse, and that must come first. Purpose is the cart, and time is the driver. Now, we've come back full circle. We're talking about principles again, and now we have to go through each one of these principles and add in purpose so the horse knows the meaning.

First, we teach the horse principles; we build a foundation of things we want the horse to know. Then, we add purpose or a reason for doing what we want the horse to do. For example, we teach the horse to side-pass because someday we might want to open a gate while on the horse's back.

Pat Parelli

In closing

by *Stephanie*

As I stated at the start I have really grappled with the best method to introduce you to this wonderful teacher. I suggest that every trainer and HR Manager incorporate a good dose of learning through observation. I don't think you can go past Pat Parelli as one an outstanding role model.

Teach well dear friends

Stephanie



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You can purchase video tapes, books and other Parelli learning products at the [Parelli website](#)

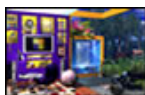
If you are in Australia take the link to the Australian website.

You can also visit the on-line learning support site I created for Parelli home study students. It's called [DBs cabin](#).



If you are someone interested in the horse•man•ship aspect of Pat and Linda's work please visit their website at www.Parelli.com

In Australia, you can periodically catch a clip of Pat Parelli on Burke's Backyard. That ought to wet your whistle - Pat is even profound in few short TV moments.



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