

Think like a **HORSE!**

*Pat Parelli tells
how you can
help your horse
to stop thinking
of you as a
predator!*

When a human gets tense or scared, their tail gets tight and they clench their hands. They grab onto the reins or the lead rope. And when you act like a predator, your horse gets scared and tense. It's a recipe for disaster!

I've seen plenty of rope burns and people going sand-skiing simply because they can't control the hole under their tail!

Try this: Smile. What's happening to the hole under your tail? Nice and relaxed... Okay, now think about a maths test or your worst teacher. Check it again. Hmmmm, not good. You see how what's happening in our mind and emotions affects our body language? And horses are super-sensitive prey animals they notice that before you do!

We have to learn to become more emotionally fit for when our prey animal decides to act like

one! When he gets emotionally bothered, we have to stay emotionally cool. If we can control our emotional reactions we can learn to have hands that close slowly and open quickly. These are the best hands around horses and it seems that instinctively, people know this. The only trouble is, they work at getting better hands when the real secret is steadier emotions.

The more you learn about the psychology of horses and about their behaviour, the more emotionally fit you become because of what the knowledge offers you. The more you develop your horsemanship skills naturally, the more safety you will enjoy around horses and the better you will handle and be able to ride them.

Amy Ward and Missy (Odette Williams photo).

predator

n 1: someone who attacks in search of booty [syn: marauder, vulture, piranha] 2: any animal that lives by preying on other animals [syn: predatory animal]

Have you ever had a house predator sitting on your knee, purring away, and then a dog walks in? "OW!" In go the claws! But what happens just before the claws go in? The area under the cat's tail gets tight!

I believe there is an anatomical connection between that and his claws! And the same applies to humans...the world's biggest house predator!



*He is watching every move you make.
You need to be his leader, before you can become his partner.*

There are two kinds of people in this world...horse people and the other kind!

Then there are five kinds of horse people; naturals, normals, nuts, nuisances and nerds! I see them all over! Do you know who else categorizes people this way? Horses!

A horse knows from the moment he sees you approach, exactly which category you fall into. They will categorize you as dangerous or non-threatening. If he thinks you are a nut or a nuisance he will react out of self preservation. He'll be unpredictable and in many ways dangerous to you. If he thinks you're a nerd, then he is going to try to dominate you. He'll do this by pushing on you, pushing on your leg aids, pushing on the bit and resisting rather than cooperating with your wishes.

Horses make a living out-thinking people. Horses as prey animals are programmed to do the opposite of what predators want. Our biggest challenge is to prove to the horse that even though we look and smell like a predator, we're really not. You see, when horses get scared, they don't think you are going to hurt them. They think you are going to kill them.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the horse is a domesticated animal, because inside every gentle horse is a wild horse, and this is the horse that hurts people and can even kill in self defense.

Horses have three major instincts—they are alert to

danger, fly from fear and are friendly and playful with the herd. If we want our horses to start acting more like partners instead of prey animals then we have to turn their attention to what WE are communicating; the flight tendencies into going the way WE want them to go, and the friendliness into bonding with US.

Becoming more emotionally fit is not just something you work on when you are around horses. You need to work on yourself continuously. It doesn't mean you stop reacting to things, but more that you have control over how you react, especially 'the hole under your tail' and its anatomical connection to your hands!

So you learn to stay calm no matter what is happening around you and not to react under pressure. (You can always go off somewhere later and have a big scream or a quiet cry!)

A Natural Horseman has to learn to think like a horse in order to be able to predict reactions. Understand that the horse always reacts instinctively, out of self preservation, so punishment is out of the question. They are motivated only by safety, comfort and play...unlike us! We are motivated by praise, recognition and material things...as opposed to those motivated by material things like rosettes, trophies and prizes!

If we're going to be successful with horses we must learn to always look at life from their point of view; think like a horse, act like a horse—which is dramatically different from →→

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distressed he will become.

For example, start jumping up and down in front of your horse and keep on jumping until he stops being scared. If you think this is going to make your horse worse then you don't understand the psychology of horses! You need to prove to him that he will live through the experience. When he stops, you stop. You'll be amazed at how quickly your horse will learn to read

the way in which WE see the world. "Walk a minute or a mile in your horse's shoes . . . "

We also have to help our horses become more emotionally fit around us! How? By gradually exposing your horse to more and more different experiences and helping him to live through his (to us) irrational fears.

Most of us are conditioned to be wary of startling or disturbing a horse... "no running, don't make any sudden moves or noises!" This is sound advice if your horse has not been helped to become braver around people. But a horse that reacts like this is dangerous in the human environment. He is considered unpredictable by most people, but if you know horses, you'd know his behaviour is entirely predictable. You would also know that you have to help him become more mentally and emotionally fit. This is not the job of a trainer, it's your responsibility as your horse's leader!

So you teach the horse to be more people savvy! And how you do that is by continuing with the stimulus that worries him until he stops being worried. You stop when he stops! Horses learn from comfort and discomfort. If you stop the stimulus while he continues to worry and dance around he will think that this is what he is supposed to do!

Think in terms of desensitizing your horse. Prove to him that there's really nothing to worry about and he will quickly learn to trust you, especially if you remain emotionally calm throughout and you can allow your horse to drift on the lead rope. Let him panic, let him dance around and snort and generally make a fool of himself. RELAX! You know he's safe and if you know it and feel it (and the hole under YOUR tail remains relaxed), eventually he'll relax too! The tighter you hold on and try to stop your horse from moving, the more claustrophobic and

that you are not threatening him. He'll start blinking, twitch his ears and lick his lips! This tells you he's learned something profound that will lead to a change in his behavior.

Horses can read people like books. The challenge for us is to be able to read them and work out what they are telling us in any given moment—is it a safety issue? A comfort issue? Or do they just want to play? The more accurate your diagnosis, the more effective you will be in winning your horse's friendship and respect.

Become conscious of your body language, expression and intention so you can teach your horse to read your actions and intentions and to know whether or not he should be worried. A horse needs a leader...calm, controlled, focused. It's up to us to learn how to become this kind of leader for our horse and even more importantly, how to be his teacher. Then we can teach our horse to become our partner.

So every time your horse gets worried and acting like a horse near a predator, relax your claws, smile with all four cheeks and just wait patiently for him to remember that YOU are the leader in his herd, and if you're not worried, then he doesn't need to be either!

*Want to become a better leader and teacher for YOUR horse? Do you dream of a revolutionary relationship and a true partnership? Call 1800 460 988 (it's a FREE call) during office hours and find out more about how you can learn real horse savvy, with your horse, in your own paddock. By the way Pat and Linda Parelli are holding a two day seminar—For Horse Lovers Only!—at the Sydney International Equestrian Centre on the 10th and 11th March 2007. Call 1800 460 988 for more information or tickets. Where else would you be? **hw***