



CHANGE YOUR HORSE'S
ATTITUDE BY FRIDAY



Your horse always seems to have his ears back. He swishes his tail when you tell him to go instead of moving his legs. Maybe he's even started bucking! It's not much fun to spend time with a sour equine.

Below are three principles both of you can see benefits from really quickly—by Friday. They are adapted from some of the 10 First Principles of Equitation Science.

BE ENCOURAGING

A great horseman in Australia, Tom Roberts, would ask: 'When you sit on a pin, why do you get off?' Think about it for a moment. It isn't because it hurts.

You get off because your brain knows that when you do, the pain will go away. Horses learn in the same way. When a behaviour gets rid of something they don't want, they learn very quickly to repeat that behaviour. This principle creates unsafe behaviour like bucking or biting, but we can also harness it to create behaviour we want. Being quick to release a cue when your horse responds is a good way to encourage him to keep trying for you, and even to do it better next time!

Monday: Ask your horse to stop from light pressure on his reins or lead rope. Be careful not to give him any other hints that you want him to stop (like slowing down yourself).

Then check:

Did you release the cue:

- ☐ a little late? (He may have stepped back or opened his mouth.)
- ☐ too early? (He may have continued moving.)
- ☐ promptly when he stopped? (Perfect! Good job.)



Tuesday: Remember your tendency from Monday, and do some simple groundwork with your horse. Just ask him to stop and go and pay close attention to your cues and rewards. Take every opportunity to tell him he is doing a good job, but not just with words. It is the release of your pressure that your horse finds most rewarding. You should notice him giving you quicker responses when you ask for something. That means you're doing it right.

BE FIRM

So, if releasing a cue when the horse makes a correct response trains him to perform that response again, what happens if you release the pressure when he hasn't done the right thing?

It still trains him.

He has no way of knowing what you want except from what you reward him for. If you accidentally reward an undesirable behaviour, he still learns it.

It's not that he has it in for you or is trying to get out of work. He has learned what solves the question you have asked him, but it is simply the wrong answer.

Wednesday: Wait for your horse to do something you don't like. Now stop and think about what rewarded the behaviour. For example, if he bites at you while you put on his saddle, do you step away?

What is the behaviour? _____

What rewarded it? _____

Now think about how you can remove that reward. Be warned that when the reward is taken away, the behaviour is likely to increase in intensity for a while, but then it will reduce.

How can you remove the reward? _____



Thursday: Sometimes just removing a reward isn't enough to deal with a tough habit that has been rewarded for years. Today, continue with Wednesday's exercise, but also creatively direct the horse towards a behaviour you would prefer. Make sure to be encouraging and reward him! For our biting example, you might quickly and firmly push his head away and give him a nice scratch on the withers when he keeps it there for a moment.

BE CONSISTENT

If you're going to be able to reward your horse for what you want and not reward it for what you don't want, you will need to really know what you want.

Before you train, stop and think about what your end goal is. The clearer your idea of what you want, the easier you will find it to reward the proper behaviour. And the more consistent you are with your rewards, the faster your horse will learn!

Friday: With the principles you've been practicing since Monday, you are on your way to getting the best out of your horse—with a good attitude. Reward him promptly when he gets it right, don't reward when he doesn't, and do that consistently. Carry these principles into your day-to-day training, and you can stop his biting, get into the championships, or perfect your piaffe.

***If you'd like to better understand how your horse learns so you can reach your goals with him,
register for a lesson or training and I will work with you through any problem.
Register at www.clairetyhorsemanship.wordpress.com.***

