

# Building Relationships Through Education

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PHOTOS BY ANGIE FIELD

Here's a step-by-step article to help you become an effective consumer of equine education. Includes how-to instruction for evaluating the vast array of educational experiences. Learn which ones will take you from the big picture down to the specific task while keeping relationship development at the forefront.

**It's wonderful to be alive** in the information age with the variety of opportunities for learning. We've come a long way from passing down horsemanship traditions around the campfire, or the boot camp-style training gained from the military. Books, articles, online courses, videos, expos, clinics and more concentrated learning environments such as camps and schools are available to most of us. The challenge is to keep from being overwhelmed and find a way to assess the vast array of information while staying focused on developing a more meaningful relationship with your horse.

In this article I will describe the teaching techniques that I use, how I have developed this approach and how you can use it to become an effective consumer of equine education. We will look at how to break information into digestible chunks then apply them with your horse without losing sight of the goal of deepening your partnership.

## FOUR STEPS to Achieving Your Horse-related Goals

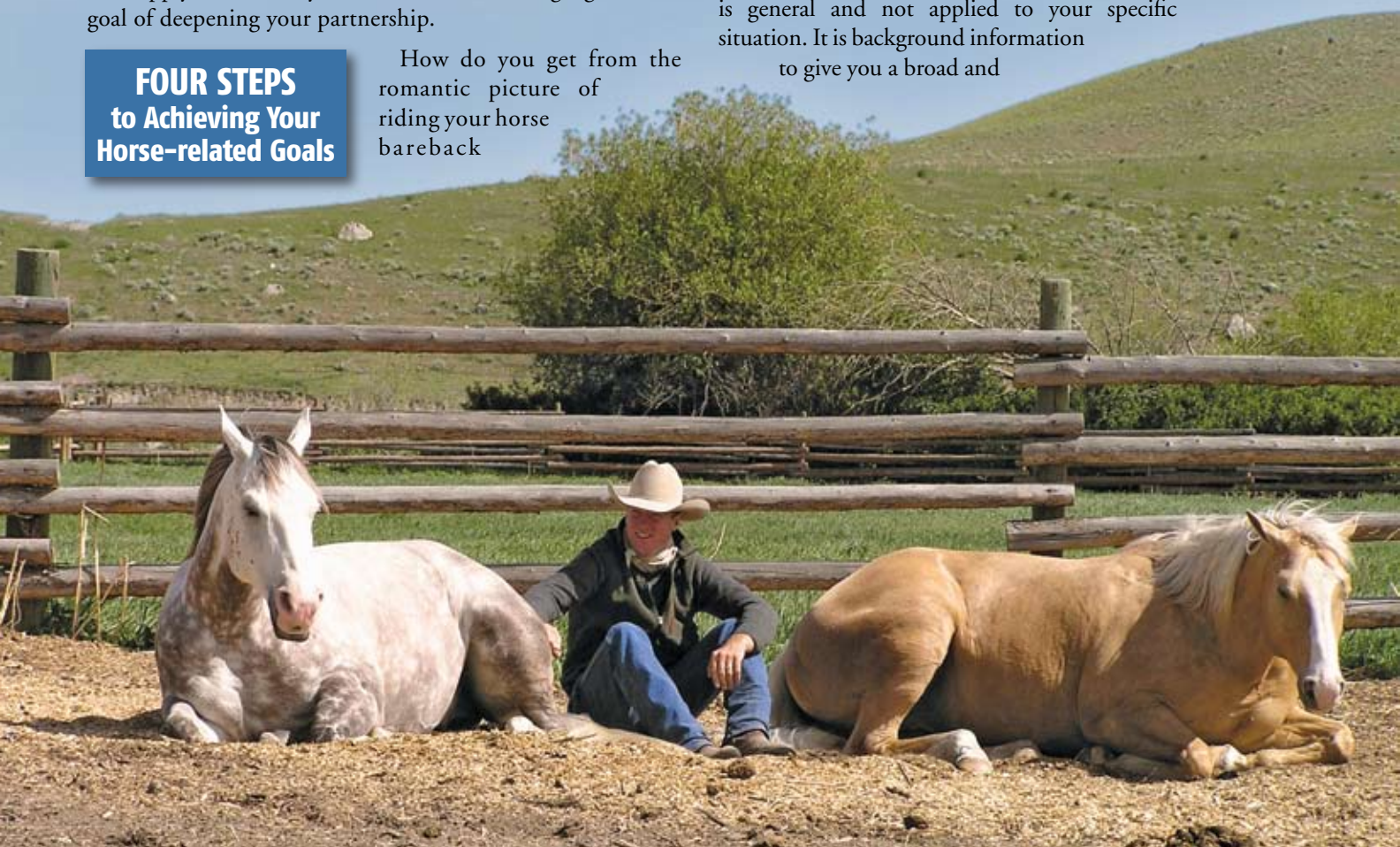
How do you get from the romantic picture of riding your horse bareback

and bridleless across the open field, through a vast array of information, to arrive at a meaningful partnership? One way is to effectively break down the information into understandable portions and apply them to your current experience and skill level.

I see four steps in this learning process: Philosophy, Concept, Theory and Task. Following these four steps will move you from the big picture to a specific applied task.

### Step 1 - Philosophy

I find it most effective to start with the biggest picture possible. This type of information comprises the philosophical basis needed to better understand your horse. This would include knowledge that allows you to get "inside the mind of the horse" to help you understand the prey animal behavior when in relationship with a human. At this stage the information is general and not applied to your specific situation. It is background information to give you a broad and



general understanding of the potential of your relationship with your partner.

### Step 2 – Concept

The philosophical content becomes the foundation for a conceptual approach to a specific situation. At this level you begin to integrate the philosophy into your evaluation of a particular behavior or problem.

For example, I'll use an issue of equalizing the "whoa" and "go" with your horse. Imagine your horse is impulsive (too much "go"). Because your horse is a forwardaholic we need to do exercises to shorten the horse so he/she doesn't feel the need to run away.

This is where the philosophical content helps. When dealing with a prey animal they are either running away because they are flying from fear or running back to the herd/barn. At the conceptual level you still won't have a hands-on task. Don't rush to the task yet because it is essential to fully diagnose the issue without losing site of your goal for relationship. At this point we know the horse wants to run impulsively and it may be out of either fear or disrespect.

### Step 3 – Theory

The next step would be to offer a theory on how to shorten a horse that wants to run. This takes the philosophical background, integrates it into your evaluation of a specific situation and suggests a proposed procedure for strengthening your relationship with your horse based on your observations.

One such solution would be to travel only short distances with lots of turns, never allowing the head of steam to build up resulting in the impulsive behavior. When you notice more relaxation coming into the movement, stop and reward your horse.

Celebrate the temporary moment, not the task. You have just built a more trusting relationship with your partner. At the theoretical level you have a proposed procedure that allows you to "test" your

concept, but there still isn't enough detail to help you to successfully complete the task in a variety of settings.

### Step 4 – The Task

Finally you are ready for a detailed task. I would instruct you to follow an exact pattern (including a series of straight lines and turns), and if you found your horse speeding up you would tighten the pattern or ask your horse to move backwards or sideways. This would refocus the horse's mind on a more complex task leaving little room for impulsive behavior until he/she begins to relax.

The goal of this step is to develop a detailed task that has a purpose. If the task doesn't work we don't necessarily need to change our thinking conceptually, just the details of the task. As long as the big picture of partnership and slowing the horse is not lost, then the detail of the task can be adjusted.

Taking time to understand the philosophical reasoning behind the task is critical for success.

At each step you keep refining your understanding of the problem, working toward a specific approach without placing more importance on the task than on relationship development. Remember, you are not trying to conquer your horse;

**"Celebrate the temporary moment, not the task."**



**"...I love helping people with horses and it doesn't matter what your horse does. That's what fun is for me!"**

## Getting Ready for Hands-on Educational Ventures

### Prepare Yourself:

- Familiarize yourself with pre-course study material if available
- Practice some of the techniques prior to the clinic or lesson
- Attend an event as a spectator to know more about what to expect

### Your Horse:

- Take a trial run with trailering to a new location the weekend before the event
- Practice possible new techniques with your horse before the clinic
- If the event is physically demanding, make sure your horse is fit
- If water taste differs from home, bring your own or flavor the water

### When you Arrive:

Just free-play it! Go with an open attitude and ask the instructor for as much help as you need. I'm in the business because I love helping people with horses and it doesn't matter what your horse does. That's what fun is for me! The discomfort that can be experienced outside of your comfort zone also carries with it the potential for the "Wow!" moment that deepens your relationship with your horse.

### About the Author

Horses have always been a central part of Jonathan Field's life. He rode and competed in both Western and English styles.

In 1995, Jonathan was introduced to Pat and Linda Parelli. He quickly worked through the Parelli program becoming a horse specialist, and has studied under Master Horseman Ronnie Willis and with 14-time Reining Champion Craig Johnson.

Jonathan is a visionary in today's horse world. He and his wife Angie travel extensively giving Parelli clinics and demonstrations. **For more information visit [www.jonathanfield.net](http://www.jonathanfield.net) or call 888-JFFIELD (533-4353)**

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you are trying to provide leadership and develop a partnership.

When you are searching for just the right educational experience, make sure you connect with a clinician or instructor who is able to help you understand your horse at this level and one who can articulate a plan for application. Following are some pointers on where you are most likely to develop your understanding at each of these levels and suggestions for using them more effectively.

## What Educational Setting Do I Choose?

### Videos, Books, Articles and CDs

These media are the best resources for the philosophical and conceptual levels of understanding and give you the most freedom from time and place restraints. This type of learning establishes the background necessary for success with the hands-on. The downside is that there is no feedback when you begin to make application, so you need a way to evaluate how you are progressing.

To help make these resources more effective, have someone videotape you at work, then watch it. Use a short tape of what you are doing and compare it to what the video wants you to do. The next step would be to send this to a professional for a more in-depth evaluation. I get over a hundred videos from my students each year.

### Expos and Demonstrations

The large horse expos are great for getting a buffet-style sampling of the horse industry under one roof. Go to expos to see who you align with philosophically.



You may observe some of the philosophy applied conceptually, but this is not the venue for information at the theoretical and detailed task levels. However, you might find the person to help you solve your challenge at the expo.

You are most likely to get to the Theory and Task level of information through the following opportunities:

### Private Lessons

#### (1 to 2 hour private coaching sessions)

Private lessons are a great place to get the detail you need specifically to initiate an immediate change in behavior and relationship with your horse. This is not where you want to pay to hear all about the philosophical reasoning behind the task. You can get that in a book or video in the comfort of your living room.

### Clinics, Camps and Schools

These events can vary in size and length. Groups can range from 10 to 30 people and the length of time can be 2 days to several months. These events are where the big changes are made. The longer-term, intense time with an instructor allows you and your horse to settle in to the information and progress on the fast track. You get a continual stream of feedback and an introduction to challenges that are not easily reproduced at home.

Clinics, camps, schools and private lessons are more intense, and your risk increases because your horse is part of the equation. Some people may fear the physical risk of dealing hands-on with horses, and others may fear being the learner in a public environment. However, the benefit of such exposure increases

exponentially with the risk. Your ability to feel good about not being good at your horsemanship determines what you get out of the investment you have made. It is essential to find a place where you feel safe and trust the instruction that is being provided.

### Horse Training (30 days to 2 years)

This is where the trainer develops your horse for you. Make sure you have selected a trainer that you are comfortable with philosophically and have analyzed the challenge conceptually. You may decide to use a trainer because you realize that you are unable to achieve the desired outcome without professional help.

To be certain you are getting the best value, make sure you are allowed to observe the sessions and have reports sent regarding your horse's progress. Start with a specific plan in mind. As the trainer begins to work with your horse, they should be able to tell you if the goal is realistic, and if not, help you adjust your goal. Don't fall into month after month of payment without a clear understanding of the time frame and outcome.

A final note on being an effective consumer of educational experiences: Become a more effective learner and you will achieve higher levels of success and relationship with your horse. Push yourself outside your comfort zone and focus on your student skills by developing an open mind and deciding if the message is right for you. The horse is one of the fastest learners in the animal kingdom, so we need to become very good students of horses to lead them. Remember: horsemanship is for life!

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