

Title: Building a Solid Foundation for Change

In this three-part series, **learn how a more fulfilling life with horses begins when you build a strong personal foundation** based on your goals.

By Anke Johnson

In following the teachings of Walter Zettl, Pat Parelli or Mark Rashid, you'll find they all have different techniques for working with horses, but they all agree on one thing:

Without a proper foundation, your horse won't progress to his true potential and be able to maintain performance—whether it's on the trail or in the arena.

If you've been away from horses for a few years, don't spend as much time as you'd like with your horses, or find that the time you do spend with them is full of thoughts involving everything *except* them, you'll find that, just like building a foundation in your horse's training is vital, **building a foundation for your relationship with these amazing animals is equally as important.**

The concept of “foundation” in training horses is not hard for a lot of people to grasp. **The same idea applied to your own life, however, might be less recognizable.** How well do you know yourself? **Your foundation is really about getting to know more about who you are and working with your strengths and your values.** In this article, I'll cover the basics of a foundation and how to get started in making a permanent change toward making your horse a priority in your life.

Your Driver

To begin building your foundation, you need to recognize what's important to you, to figure out your “why” or what drives you. Do a self-assessment to determine how you see horses fitting in your life. Ask yourself *why* you want horses to be a part of your life, and you'll start to determine your driver—your purpose or motivation. **Determining your driver will help you set priorities and help you to refocus if you veer off your path.**

For example, when I was in my early 30s, my driver was to get to know myself better. I'd just gone through a divorce and was determined to find out who I was as an independent person. Now I'm in my 40s, and my driver is to be truly present—physically, mentally and emotionally—for my young son as he grows up. In my early 50s, who knows what my driver will be? Maybe it'll be to check off as much as I can from my “bucket list” and to have a blast doing so!

Your Destination

The second step toward building a solid foundation is to determine your main goal. The word “goal” can be frightening to some people because it sounds like “work” or a

commitment that cannot be changed. Rather, think of this far-reaching goal as your destination. Where do you want to eventually end up? Imagine what you'd like to be doing with horses, say, one year from now, and paint a picture for yourself. **Now you have something to reach for.**

My goal is to ride my Thoroughbred, Murphy, at Second Level dressage. I ask myself: What do I need and what does Murphy need to be able to get there? The answer to this question will take us to the third step: the road map to our ultimate destination.

Your Road Map

To get to your end goal, you'll have many smaller goals along the way, sort of like the grains of sand in concrete mix. You can't pour the concrete for a solid foundation without every grain of sand! So focusing on one small goal for this week, you can lay out your road map. What does your picture look like now? I'll bet it's much more realistic, and it probably generates some excitement toward achieving it!

A lot of people lose focus here and return to the "old" way of doing things; they quickly take action with little preparation, inviting frustration, anxiety and failure. Completing each step along your road map, however, will ensure a solid foundation for change. You want your foundation to look like provolone cheese—smooth and solid—not Swiss cheese. A solid foundation is one you can build and depend on.

Creating a roadmap is a unique process for each individual. Because end goals differ, as well as lifestyle, budget and tools available it's best to customize your roadmap so that it works for you. You can choose to create your own, or use one that's already been created from proven masters and teachers such as Parelli, Rashid or Zettl for example.

If you do choose to create your own you can follow a basic guideline that I use with all of my coaching clients. **First, determine your end goal, what do you want to ultimately wish to achieve? Then look at the tools, budget and timeline that you have. Be realistic here as many a great plan has been foiled by being unrealistic about one or all of these factors. Finally fill in the small steps that it will take to get you to your ultimate goal.**

For example, if you'd like to be able to canter through an open field with joy and not worry or fear, ask yourself first "where are you now"? If you're walking and trotting in an indoor or round pen, then maybe one of your small steps would be to take your horse for a walk with you on the ground out in a wider open space. If you don't have access to an open field, maybe one of your first steps would be to trailer to an open field, and let your horse and you become comfortable and familiar with that location with you on the ground. Next, you would progress to riding your horse at a walk in either scenario. Slowly, step by small doable no-fail step you would inch your way toward that ultimate goal! **And I can guarantee as you get closer to that goal, that you look back and**

think “wow, this was fast”! If you decide you want to create this roadmap but are looking for some support and guidance, we can certainly do that and put one together for you based on both your and your horses needs.

If you find you’re frustrated because you’re not progressing along your road map, ask yourself what part of your foundation may be missing. It’s possible you’ve missed a step. **Signs that your foundation may have holes in it include procrastination, frustration and excuses, relapse, losing focus, and attaining your goals but not maintaining them to make a permanent change or new habit.** You can compare this situation to someone you know who’s always had a goal to lose weight but has trouble keeping it off (often called a yo-yo dieter). The culprit here is often a foundation with holes in it.

Perhaps your goal is to build trust with your horse. Your road map may include riding four times each week, but you’re only riding twice. By only focusing on the ride, you may be missing the big picture. Your larger goal requires emotional, mental and physical components, which might simply require undemanding time with your horse rather than a strict protocol of riding. Take into account the “full enchilada” as you embark on building that trust with your horse.

Back up a few steps and reevaluate what you can do to ensure you get the time together and, more importantly, the trust that you both need. Once you have the trust, you’ll be more productive with your ride time, and you and your horse will have more fun being together!

Once you can relate to the importance of a solid foundation, you can begin to build your own foundation for a positive future with horses. In the following articles in this series, I’ll discuss the process of change and the role of a solid foundation in:

- Confidence
- Self-esteem
- Time management
- Stress management
- Your physical self
- Having a positive experience
- Your horse’s performance

Bio: Anke Johnson began coaching others more than 20 years ago. She’s a certified Professional Health Coach, certified fitness trainer, certified Nutritional Consultant and Reiki Master Practitioner. As a lifelong rider, Anke understands how the challenges of horsemanship and the challenges of life interweave. With Anke’s help, equestrians and busy career people gain the self-knowledge, confidence and body awareness they need to get them closer to that perfect ride, in and out of the saddle. Learn more about her business, Natural Solutions by Anke, at www.naturalsolutionsbyanke.com or 608-467-0008.