

Title: Building a Solid Foundation Part 2 - Thriving in Change

Making a stronger commitment to horses is challenging, and changing your ways isn't always easy. The strategies in part two of this three-part series can help you through.

By Anke Johnson

In my first article, I emphasized the importance of a strong foundation for making horses a priority in your life. **By now, you've determined your "why" or your purpose in your current pursuits. You've chosen a goal—somewhere you'd like to be with your horse in a year. And you've charted a road map to get you to that goal, dotted with tiny steps to keep you focused along the way.**

As you travel along the road map, you may find some resistance along your path. **The resistance will come from outside forces (what I call "life happens")—a sick child, a busy week at work—as well as internal forces—that little voice inside your head that says, "You can't make this change last! Who are you kidding?"** Its human nature to resist change, because making a change is generally more difficult than leaving things the way they are.

I used the example of Walter Zettl's, Pat Parelli's and Mark Rashid's foundation principles in the first article because if I had to start over with a new horse, I would want his foundation to be built by a combination of their principles. Likewise, you'll find that your drive for making a change and making a commitment to horses in your life comes from various sources. **Whatever the source, successful change starts here!**

James Prochaska, Ph.D., director of the Cancer Prevention Research Center and professor of clinical and health psychology at the University of Rhode Island, authored the book *Changing for Good*, in which he outlines six stages to permanent change:

- 1. Pre-contemplation: resisting change, making excuses and feeling hopeless about your situation**
- 2. Contemplation: realizing the potential for a positive outcome, stepping out of your comfort zone and enlisting others to assist you in your quest for change**
- 3. Preparation: becoming motivated by your future self, making tougher choices and turning away from old behavior**
- 4. Action: exchanging your habits and seeing rewards**
- 5. Maintenance: balancing new habits, working with lapse and relapse; this can be the toughest stage.**
- 6. Termination: no longer thinking about the challenge of this change; the "new you" becomes your new comfort zone.**

These stages—or steps, let's call them—are the clearest outline for change I've ever encountered. **The first three—pre-contemplation, contemplation and preparation—are most important of the six. Without these, your foundation will crumble and you will slip back to old habits, like the yo-yo dieter.** Setting a solid foundation of the first three steps requires discipline and—possibly even more so—support and accountability.

It also asks you to create self-awareness and asks you to resist springing into action without a plan!

Horse people in general are determined, goal-oriented people. Many can make any change or shift they put their minds to; others realize the benefit of having people support them and provide accountability so they can reach their goals. **In coaching people through change, I've found that many view the need for support and accountability in the same way they view fear—as a weakness. We don't, however, view riding lessons with a qualified instructor as a weakness—more as a strength!**

One coaching client I worked with; described his experience with support and accountability through an elementary-student tutoring program for which he was a volunteer. **His student was unfocused and unmotivated, pulling in Ds and Fs. After several weeks of meeting just once per week, this student began getting As and Bs. The only thing my client did for this student was provide support and accountability. This gave my client a wonderful “Aha” moment! Support and accountability do not show weakness; they exponentially build strength.**

Having someone who can support you and hold you accountable—whether it's a friend, family member, trainer or life coach—actually results in a symbiotic relationship. While they support you in your growth, they themselves often learn what they need to reach their own goals.

You might recognize your own story in my personal situation:

I grew up with horses, but when I was married at age 21, I gave up horses as well as the arts—drawing, piano and violin—that I loved so much. When I divorced, I started building a foundation to determine what was most important to me. It was a painful period of discovery but one that's led me back to horses, art and helping others make the same discoveries.

The foundation I built surrounding my horses involved every aspect—the time commitment, social aspect and financial obligations, as well as some emotional and physical fear. The people who got me on my path to a strong foundation allowed me to move past my fears and find my way back to a fulfilling life. A good foundation, plus the people to support it, builds confidence and emotional strength—two elements many riders are seeking.

If you find that you continually try to do things differently but end up in the same place or that you're stuck with habits that aren't getting you to your goals, reach out to a friend, spouse, trainer or life coach so someone can help you get back to the horse life you want. **The process of change is not one that takes place overnight, and it's not one that you should be ashamed of asking for help with.**

This is not to say that with this support and accountability, you'll never take a few steps backward or run astray of your road map. It's natural to “lapse” into old

habits, and that's OK. That's the time you need to call on your support and accountability team, review your road map, reevaluate your goal, make adjustments to stay focused, and get back to work. Certainly, this is the time to make sure your lapse does not turn into a relapse!

In the final article in this series, **we'll look at how building a solid foundation for a positive future with horses plays a role in confidence, self-esteem, time management, stress management, your physical self and 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.