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# The Path to True Horsemanship

## HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND AND LEADER

This month I want to focus on horse behavior and how to communicate better with your horses. This will all be leading up to the release of my next webinar about how you can better understand horse behavior. The upcoming webinar will be covering many of the ways that your horse is trying to communicate with you, and how you can use that communication to become a better leader and horseman. Be sure to tune in Sunday, December 6 at 7 p.m. to [TheHorsesAdvocate.com/HorseTalk](http://TheHorsesAdvocate.com/HorseTalk). But first, here are some key ideas to prepare for the big reveal.

I know that many of you have read my book, "The 10 Irrefutable Laws of Horsemanship," and if you haven't, it's time to buy your copy now. This short guide is essential to understanding the communication between horses and humans. The first four laws dictate the physical nature of the horse/human relationship:

1. A horse can hurt you and even kill you
2. The horse that can kill you is your own
3. Always use a halter and lead rope, stay connected
4. Always place yourself between the horse and the exit

The next six laws concern the leadership and communication that must exist between you and the horse:

5. Become the leader
6. Personalities of horses
7. Seek first to understand ...
8. ... Then to be understood
9. The law of energy
10. A horse is a horse

My reason for creating these laws, and the upcoming webinar, is simple: I want to teach people how to care for and communicate with their horses. Many people think that leadership or horsemanship is talking to the horse; in reality, leadership isn't

talking, it's listening. It is only once you listen to the horse and hear what he is trying to say that you can start building a relationship.

I know this sounds a little far-fetched, but imagine this scenario: You are in a foreign country where you don't speak the language — China, for example. You're in the middle of a huge conference room and you desperately need to use the restroom, but no matter how hard you look, there isn't a bathroom to be found. On the verge of tears, you try to ask everyone you see where the bathroom is, but they all either ignore you, look puzzled, or seem angry with you for some reason. Finally one person understands your gestures and leads you to the nearest bathroom just in the nick of time. This person probably just became your new best friend, not because they told you what to do, but because they listened to your needs.

It's not hard to imagine this same situation for the horse. When a horse is fearful or in pain, they will try to tell you in all of the ways they know how; by misbehaving, bucking, or simply refusing to work. People respond in a variety of ways, including anger, ignoring the problem, or simply labeling the horse dangerous and unrideable. The sad truth is that many good horses have been written off as unmanageable simply because no one took the time to listen to what they were trying to say.

Fortunately there is a solution to this problem — and it starts with you. If you are like most people, then you have probably made the mistake of talking to your horse instead of communicating with him. As you learn more about leadership and horsemanship, this mistake becomes a chance to grow. In order to do this you must know the 10 irrefutable laws of horsemanship, and use those laws to pay attention to the horse. Remember, seek to understand, THEN to be understood. If you have any questions about this, be sure to sign up for my webinar next month, where I will be giving practical advice for horse owners who want to create trust and partnership.

*Doc T*



# Follow Up on No-Grain Challenge With CTA THA

Every day we get an opportunity to listen to a horse owner tell us their story about how grain has affected their horse. The funny thing about these stories, though, is that while most of the owners agree with my discussion that grain can cause inflammation of the gut, they don't think it is happening to their horse.

I will spend time telling a horse owner why horses shouldn't have grain, but it isn't until I mention one sign of intentional inflammation that they realize that their own horse may be affected. For example, this week I was explaining the inflammatory effects of grain to the owner of a horse that was showing very subtle signs of inflammation. In fact, it was because of my sensitivity to this issue that I believed this horse was affected. Let me explain.

Melissa and I see thousands of horses every year. From our position, we get to see a lot of honest reactions to a not-so-normal situation. Imagine you are sitting in your dentist's chair with the drool bib placed below your chin by the assistant. Soft music plays in the background as you observe the interminable waiting period they put you through as you wait for the dentist to appear. Your anxiety increases because you know something bad is going to occur and you cannot avoid it.

Suddenly, through the door, a monkey walks in, wearing a white lab coat, glasses, and polished shoes. Your eyes bulge out of their sockets as the monkey climbs onto your lap and proceeds to open your mouth and clean your teeth.

Are you calm?

A lot of horses feel that way about us as we enter their stall. Some have past experiences they start to feed off of, and the nerves quickly fray.

What we notice right away is a depth of nervousness from the horse and the horse's ability (or inability) to control their reaction.



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The most obvious conclusion we come to is that horses NOT on grain respond with a very cool and controlled energy, while horses ON grain (any amount of grain) respond with more activity. Some go nuts.

Horse owners and trainers often conclude incorrectly that the unwanted behavior is a result of age, lack of training, a past experience, or the horse's personality. However, in our experience, we respectfully disagree that these are the primary reasons. Here is what we believe is the cause.

The owner of the horse I mentioned earlier thought her horse was perfect until I mentioned that horses with gut inflammation often don't like to load onto a trailer. The owner said this was true for her horse and then asked how these conditions were connected. My first answer was based on the experience of owners who, after removing grain from their horses' diets, now found their horses loading on their own with just the lead thrown over their neck. My theory is that without gut inflammation and the pain associated with it, these horses no longer feared the pain caused by the bouncing trailer over the rough and curving roads. For comparison, think of people (maybe you) who get sick when reading in a car or when flying, especially during turbulence. Do you want to get into those situations, or do you do everything you can to avoid them?

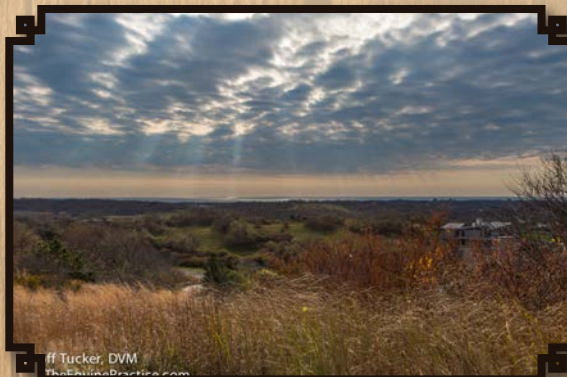
A few weeks ago, Melissa was asked to work on a horse that had been rescued three weeks earlier and had never had a halter on or been touched by humans. The horse had been fed nothing but grass and water for his 4 to 5 years of life. Every excuse for bad behavior could be made: age, lack of training, personality, and a new home with human contact. By all measures, this horse should have been almost impossible to float.

We won't say it was easy. Building a trusting relationship within a few minutes and then getting the horse to allow you to place a steel file inside his mouth can be a challenge. But as you might guess, Melissa did just that. Even though the horse moved about



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the stall and had a look on its face similar to yours with the monkey on your lap, the connection was made and the job at hand was done well and completely. It was a testament to Melissa's skills as a horseman, but it was also evidence of a horse not fighting himself.

The most obvious sign of grain intolerance for us as equine dentists is a horse that has a wall built up emotionally and a difficult time connecting. They appear shut down to us. Thankfully, because of the horsemanship skills we have developed, we can still connect with the horse and float their teeth. However, in discussing their behavior with the owner, we often hear the same thing: doesn't like to be brushed, girthy, bucks when asked to do more than just walk, spooks on the trail, water squirts when defecating, cranky, difficulty loading or trailering, not sweating in the Florida heat, poor recovery times, sluggishness, can't get weight on even with abundant grain (hard keepers), obese horses with a passion for grain and hay (what I call Hoover vacuums), and other more subtle signs.

The solution is to try JUST FOR TWO WEEKS a no-grain diet. Just grass, hay, water, and pure salt (NOT the sugar-filled red trace mineral salt blocks). This means NO treats, cookies, carrots, apples, etc. Remove all supplements because most have sugar. It's just for two weeks.

If your horse starts to lose weight, then add a non-inflammatory fat to the diet. The best source is coconut flakes that can be found in Cool Stance or Renew Gold (with Cool Stance in it). All vegetable

oils are inflammatory, especially corn oil. Many horses over 25 years of age will need this coconut added to keep their weight, but do not add this to any horse unless they cannot maintain their weight with just grass and hay.

Most horses will not lose weight, and the hay consumption will remain the same (with the exception of it increasing because it is cold out and there is no more pasture. This happens no matter what). You can remove the grain immediately. No slow withdrawal is necessary because as soon as you stop the grain, the inflammation stops.

Remember, this is only for two weeks — just as a trial. If it doesn't work, you will not have lost a thing. Most people see a positive response in just two days.

There is one thing I ask. Please start a diary and write down everything you observe about your horse on day one. Then every day for two weeks, write down your observations. Send this diary to me with permission to put it on my website. Speaking of which, go there now and read and see the testimonies from people who have already done this.

Your horse will thank you.  
<http://theequinepractice.com/grain>



I knew nothing about incisor reduction until I looked into your dental school and learned about the procedure and its controversy. It was never proposed by my past equine dentists and veterinarians and obviously not by you when you started floating my horse's teeth. Now everywhere I look online there is a discussion about it.

I went back and reread your unit on Theories of Modern Equine Dentistry to try to clear up some of the questions I had, but I am still not entirely convinced as to whether incisor reductions should or shouldn't happen. They (The American School of Equine Dentistry) are saying that some horses are not able to chew properly because their incisors are too long and thus prevent the molars from making contact. Another expert, Dr. Deb Bennet, wrote, "Horse is 'long in the tooth' I think, meaning that his incisor teeth have, over time, experienced less wear than the cheek teeth, and are now exhibiting the accumulated excess length in such a manner that, when he closes his front teeth, his cheek teeth have trouble occluding as they should." Can this happen?

Can you please explain in more detail why you don't find it necessary to reduce incisors? Have you ever seen a horse that was unable to chew properly because its molars didn't make contact? I believe you say the incisors don't meet when chewing, so they don't get in the way. Do I remember this correctly, and is this fact? I think you compared it to people chewing and how our incisors don't meet. I just want more information so I can be confident when discussing this controversial topic with others. Thanks!

My answer:

There are many ways to answer these questions you have about incisor reduction. Each will stand on its own.

1) In 2003 I had lunch with Dr. Paddy Dixon. He has completed or supervised more research on horse teeth than anyone I know and is a co-author of the textbook "Equine Dentistry" with Easley and Schumacher. He specifically asked me my thoughts about incisor reduction, and I was surprised then that he and I agreed on the subject. We both believed that any irregularities of the shape of the incisors was secondary to abnormal movement of the jaw caused by pain, and that correcting the cheek teeth problems would prevent or possibly correct the incisor alignment. He said to me then that he believed that incisor reduction was inappropriate and Great Britain was rapidly moving away from performing incisor reductions. He further added that a colleague in the U.S. had recently caused the death of a horse as a direct result of infection from the incisor reduction. Since then I have also heard of additional deaths from infection, caused by reduction. In my opinion, the death of one horse from a procedure is too much, and suspect should be brought upon the procedure immediately.



2) In my aging project where I photographed the incisors from straight on, I observed that many horses — when resting — kept a gap of about 1/4 inch (6 mm) open, with their tongue resting in the gap. But there is more. The photograph was an instant representation, but often it took many moments and "bad shots" to get the one seen in the study. While waiting for the moment of "occlusion," I observed the tongue dart out and back in between every opening and closing of the jaw. I became fascinated by the fact that in some horses, the tongue moved straight out, which correlated with a normal incisor wear. In my own horse, whose teeth were floated regularly from an early

age, he had a V shape to the occlusal table. While photographing him, I observed his tongue darting out the right side, going back in, and on the next movement, darting out the left side. He repeated this even distribution of left and right sides, and it became obvious why the incisors were in a V shape.

As I continued my observations, I found that horses with misshapen incisors had an associated uneven tongue movement. To this day, I cannot determine if this is in avoidance from cheek tooth points or just a personal preference of the horse. My horse had no cheek tooth pain (points) yet he preferred his alternating tongue movement.



3) Horses with irregular incisor occlusal surfaces, missing incisors, and extreme misalignments (parrot mouth) all harvest grass without any problems and maintain their weight (some with BCS > 6). I have never seen a chewing or weight issue (BCS < 4) caused by irregular incisors.

4) A paradigm shift needs to occur in those believing that the incisors are preventing closure of the cheek teeth. The paradigm is the belief these people have that the grinding of the teeth is what causes the wear of the teeth. If we add that the movement of the tongue across the occlusal surface is a cause of attrition of the occlusal surface, and is possibly the major cause of attrition, then a different conclusion will be reached. This seems possible when you look at the horse's unrestricted ability to harvest food with any configuration of the incisors, including the absence of incisors and severe misalignment. In other words, where the tongue moves, attrition occurs, and the opposing teeth over-erupt to fill in the gap. The tall tooth material the dentists are reducing is irrelevant in the movement of the jaw and tongue. In fact, its removal may be extreme for the horse where a more gentle approach would be more appropriate, such as frequent removal of the offending sharp points to allow the mouth to self-correct.

5) The need to "DO SOMETHING" in response to something our eyes see that offends our minds because the pattern we see is not in agreement to our sense of "normal" needs to stop. Until all theories are thoroughly examined and tested, we all need to stop "doing something" for the sake of doing something. This is not medicine, nor is it in the best interest of the horse. Get your eyes off the incisors and look at the whole horse. Judge the BCS. Observe the sharp points. Eliminate all pain in the mouth. Wait and observe again in three months. Address weight loss through parasite evaluation, feeding program evaluation, and a thorough medical exam. Remember, the purpose of teeth is to form a swallowable bolus. If the horse is swallowing, then the teeth are NOT the problem.

Finally, keep this in mind: The incisor reduction has been around, on and off, for decades. The last person to advocate it told my friend, Frank Albert of Albert's Equine Dental Supply, that he had invented a new "profit center." That man is locally called "The Butcher."

If I, a Cornell vet school graduate with 32 years and over 61,000 floats done, can't find a reason to perform an incisor reduction, and have never had a horse require one, then that should be enough reason. In addition, if an incisor reduction has never directly helped a horse, but has caused the death of 1 or more horses, then the procedure needs to be stopped.

Prevention is better than correction! Find out why an appointment every six months is so important.

<http://www.horsemanshipdentistry.com/straight-from-the-horses-mouth/>  
or call 888- HORZVET (467-9838) to schedule your next appointment