

## What An Attitude

By Marie Hoffman

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Shelly, a Quarter Horse, that was a few weeks short of 3 years old came to my farm to see if I could change her attitude. She was a 14 hand, liver chestnut mare the people had raised. Somehow when she was growing up, she learned to pin her ears and then back it up when people did anything she did not like when they were around her. She had chased her owners out of her pen on more than one occasion.

Her owners had been trying to ride her around their farm, but she did not cooperate in any way. She tossed her head, turned the wrong way, trotted off when she felt like it, and when the rider tried to make her behave she would have a fit, buck and rear. When you approached her on the ground, she would face you and pin her ears. If you disciplined her for pinning her ears she would turn and kick at you.

I had the experience the third day she was at my farm of her pinning her ears and then backing it up with a kick. Shelly did not respect humans. I immediately picked up a long whip and went directly back into her stall. She approached me again and promptly pinned her ears at me. I slapped her nose again with my hand and scolded her, don't pin your ears. When she again turned to kick at me I slapped her firmly in the rump with the whip. She acted shocked as she jumped to the back of her stall. She then stood in the corner of her stall. I stayed clam and clearly let her know the boundaries of acceptable behavior. The second she changed her attitude I changed my posture. This let her know I was only disciplining the act and was not out to get her. I did not approach her to pet her at this time. I went out of the stall and came back in. When I approached still carrying the whip, she thought about pinning her ears then changed her mind and let me stroke her shoulder. I did this several more times that day. She reacted the same through all the lessons that day.

The next day when I approached her in her stall, she again thought about pinning her ears but changed her mind. She turned her head to the back of the stall. I tapped her on the rump with the whip until she turned toward me. When she did turn toward me I backed up. This encouraged her to come my direction. With Shelly facing me, I stroked her with the whip and petted her shoulder.

Through Shelly's body language, I knew that fear was not causing her aggression toward me. The training techniques used for a horse that is aggressive because of fear are very different than the horse that is dominating the humans around them. With two people leading, one on each side in the Homing Pigeon leading position, we went to the round pen.

In doing the training I am going to describe, I would like to stress this should only be done by someone who knows the horse's body language perfectly. If you do not know when to push and when to back off, you will mess your horse up worse than he already is. I use this technique only on horses that have no respect for humans. I do not use this if the horse is already afraid. If improperly used, this method will make a calm horse afraid. Working in the round pen as I did with this mare was to establish respect on the instinctive level. My goal was to teach her to respect me enough to be able to work safely around her. It is impossible to train a horse properly if you are worried about being hurt. She needed to learn to have her first reaction and thoughts to be submissive, instead of dominating those around her.

To reestablish this respect, I let Shelly go in the round pen. It is solidly made with high walls, where a horse can't jump out or escape in any way. I asked her to move with the lunge whip by snapping it on the ground near her. She pinned her ears and turned to kick at me. I struck her on the rump. She kicked at the whip before she moved off. This is all I wanted at first is to have her move forward when asked. She still wanted to control the situation.

After going a couple of rounds, I asked her to change direction. She would kick at the whip and pin her ears at me whenever she got close, or if I slapped her with the whip to get her moving. I used just enough pressure to keep her moving and changing directions. After about 15 min she was getting tired and started to look at me when I invited her to turn toward me to stop. When she looked at me I backed up, taking the pressure off of her. When I approached her to pet her, she ran off. I asked her to go some more. Finally she stood as I approached. When I reach up to rub her forehead she pinned her ears at me. I immediately sent her back out to trot and canter around a few more times. I invited her back to face me to rest and she was willing. It took another 3 or 4 more times before she would let me rub her forehead and not pin her ears. She was now moving forward with a signal of the whip, and was no longer kicking at me or the whip when I urged her forward. Once she would stop, when I asked, I asked her to walk with me without me holding on to her. She at first ran the other way. I asked her to move a few more times around and then invited her to look at me again. After about another 5 min she decided to stay near me and follow me rather than run off.

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By now she was hot and breathing hard. She wanted to rest and she realized I was in control of her resting. She decided accepting me as leader was better than running or trotting around the round pen.

Using the round pen in this way can be very speculator to watch. Because I very seldom use this method, I had a couple of my working students watch because it is very impressive to watch the mares attitude change so much in about 30 minutes. But there are problems with using this method, which is why I very seldom use it.

Yes I did establish dominance over Shelly, but in turn everyone who handles her will also have to establish dominance. Shelly is reacting only within her instincts of herd behavior and flight. When I led her out of the round pen that day I still did not have the ability to get her to concentrate on me outside of the round pen. I signaled her to look at me and then had to use the whip on her hip to signal her to turn to face me so I could have control leading her.

This method also confuses the horse when you are lunging. The horse thinks you want him to face you when you are cueing him to move off. Shelly did get confused on this matter for about 10 days after. With careful use of my body language and understanding how she became confused we worked it out so she lunged properly again.

The round pen work did have a positive effect on her attitude though. I could approach her in the stall now without worry about being bitten. For safety reasons, I did not go into her stall without a whip in my hand for several weeks. I needed it to make sure I could reinforce my dominance if she showed aggression in any way to me. My working student, Becca, helped me with her, and also did not go into her stall without a whip. It was important that all persons were consistent in their handling of her so what I did in the round pen transferred to persons other than myself.

Shelly was also hard to bridle and fly spray. We used grain for both to change her attitude. The first time we bridled her, it took two people and many minutes. The next time, I held a small amount of grain in my hand with the bit. Shelly took the bit right away along with the grain. I did this so she would not get so caught up in fighting our efforts. She would not think enough to realize what we were asking. She was just resisting because we were asking. With the grain, the bridling no longer was an issue. She learned in a week to take the bit with no fuss. At times the grain will have to be used again but just once or twice. Then she would take the bit again. She also realized the bit meant restraint, and though her attitude was better, she was not overly willing to cooperate yet. We had her mouth checked by a vet and her wolf teeth pulled before she came in for training. With any behavior problem, the chance that pain is causing should be eliminated first.

The fly spray was a different matter. She was truly afraid of it. I fed her a handful of grain while I sprayed her to get her to chew. She had a hard time at first. Shelly tied well, so in a stall I tied her to a wall. I then gave her grain and sprayed her body with a fly spray mixture that was harmless if she had to be soaked in it. The first week I did have to spray her till she was very wet. I kept spraying her until she stood. At first, only her body and shoulder. I gradually moved to spraying her whole body over the next week.

Over the next weeks I changed sprayers; she would become good with one but then be afraid of a different sounding sprayer. At no time did I scold her. That would have made her only more afraid. It took the 4 weeks before she was good about spraying. You no longer needed grain and could spray her all over in a stall or out.

To work her in the round pen, I put her in a bosal and her snaffle. I lunged her and had to work to teach her now to go around and not to face me. I made sure she knew how to move away the day I round penned her, so she wasn't too bad about turning in toward me. When you round pen a horse to train them to face you, sometimes the horse will not lunge well because they are always turning to face you.

My goal was to teach her to stop on the verbal command HO. She learned this in a couple of days. She wasn't the picture of cooperation, but she did give in after a few minutes. She resisted by not going forward, and/or she turned toward you, but was good about stopping.

Then it was time to mount. I had my student Becca mount her first in a stall to make sure she was not afraid of the rider. She was not afraid at all. Then out in the round pen, we kept her on a lunge line. Becca rode her at a walk and turned her. She was

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very resistant pulling against the bit, shaking her head, and refusing to move forward. Becca used her body to cue the horse to turn, also using a vibrating rein. To move forward, Becca used her legs to signal to move forward and I encouraged her with the lunge whip. Shelly would reluctantly turn and go forward.

By the third ride I was able to take off the lunge line and gave Becca a long whip to signal with. Shelly would stop when Becca signaled her to move forward with the whip or leg. She kept signaling and I reinforced it with the lunge whip. Over the next two weeks, Shelly tried all the things she had previously done to her owners. I had also come to the conclusion that Shelly was not actually trained to respond to signals to go forward, turn and stop. We worked her like she was a newly started colt. We still found lots of resistances, she would turn to the right into the fence to turn around, just trot straight forward, toss her head very high and refuse to move forward.

Turning around to the right was her main resistance. To stop her from turning right, I had Becca use her turning aids of legs, body, eyes, focus and reins. I kept her moving from behind so she couldn't stop and turn. This was effective as long as we did all the above. But Shelly still wanted and would turn back to the right going either direction at any opportunity. She did not improve over the next week. She would be good one day but if she wanted to go look at something the next day outside the round pen, we had to deal with it again.

My solution was to have Becca use the dressage whip she was riding with, and tap Shelly on the muzzle when she thought of turning to the right. This worked. After one very tiring session of Shelly getting tapped on the muzzle every time she thought or tried to turn. Shelly would respect the whip, and no longer tried if she was shown the whip when she thought to turn. That behavior gradually diminished over the next week.

Her second and almost equal resistance was not going forward. We worked with Becca riding and me on the ground reinforcing if necessary on teaching her to move forward from the signals of the riders legs. In the beginning Shelly would pin her ears and come toward me in the middle and kick at me while I was encouraging her with the whip to move forward. Becca turned her in tight circles until Shelly got dizzy. Then stopped her and proceeded like nothing had happened. This resistance only lasted one lesson.

During the first weeks while ridden, Shelly reared to whirl to the right once and kicked at the whip once. Both times we spun her until she was dizzy and Shelly decided the behavior was not worth trying again.

We had to use a vibrating signal from the rider's legs to move forward. A kick only caused her to balk more. The long whip used on her barrel right behind our leg was most effective in getting Shelly to move forward.

While we were working in the round pen we also taught Shelly to trot faster and slower. The challenge was in getting Shelly cooperative about moving forward, slowing down she did easily. We did a lot of trot work to encourage her to want to move forward.

The least demonstrated of her resistances was trotting forward uncontrolled. Once we had her stopping and slowing she gave up trying this escape route. In the round pen there was no where to go anyway. By the time we got to the arena she no longer thought of this resistance. By asking Shelly to bend while ridden, she did not use the head tossing resistance until she quit using the other three. She did toss her head while lunging though. We put loose side reins on her. Once she found the limits of them, she did not toss her head at all while lunging.

We actually had a few days where Shelly was cooperative and kind of fun to ride. At least she wasn't such a struggle. Though we always ended on a positive note, the process to get there was sometimes quite a bit of work.

We had been riding her in a bosal and D-ring snaffle. Teaching her with the snaffle and using the bosal if we needed to have control. It would have been ideal to train her in a snaffle for several months to really teach her how to accept the bit, but I did not have that option. It became clear that this was not going to be enough control for the owner's ability. I put her in a Tom Thumb bit with rubber bit guards. I figured I would eliminate the possibility of resisting by biting the shanks of the bit with the bit guards before Shelly thought of it.

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The owners did not want to leave Shelly here much more than a month. So I put her in this bit to give the owner control she may need if necessary without being harsh. The owner was a good rider with excellent hands.

We started riding Shelly in the big arena. She was quite good for her. We walked and trotted and within a lesson or two were doing well, except for the occasional head toss in resistance to the bit. The third time in the arena though she decided that the head tossing was her new resistance.

At this point she was cooperating for the most part though. She was bridling, being fly sprayed, walking, trotting slow and fast, turning, going forward, and backing well. She had learned a lot in 4 weeks. I was very pleased with her progress.

To make the right thing easy and the wrong difficult, I would hold the reins low on my thigh, and kick Shelly forward every time she tossed her head. I then released all pressure as soon as she released any pressure in my hands. I was able to eliminate the behavior for me within in about ten minutes and she was good for the rest of that ride. She did toss her head a little at the beginning of each ride, but gave it up within the first few minutes. Shelly was learning to give to the bit instead of pushing into it or tossing her head to resist it like she had done before she came to be trained. It would take a little more time for her to give up this resistance. The owner learned in her weekly lessons, the techniques we used and how to keep Shelly on the right track.

The greatest thing in all that happened in the 5 weeks Shelly was at my barn was how her attitude changed from being a horse who was dangerous to be around and clearly did not want to accept leadership from humans, to a horse who enjoyed humans company and leadership for the most part. She was certainly more relaxed and calmer. Though she still needs more training and correct riding, Shelly was now on track to make a nice riding horse.

The names have been changed.