

# Is It Time for Hoof-Care Revolution? Part II

Based on a paper read at the inaugural conference of the Equine Soundness Association, April 22, 2008. Published in *Veterinary Times* (UK) August 11, 2008, Vol. 38, pp 25, 26, 28; and September 22, 2008, Vol. 38, pp 24-27; and reprinted here by permission.

by Robert Cook FRCVS, PhD

## Part II: Principles of Persuasion

The New York Times bestseller *Made to Stick*, by Chip and Dan Heath (18), provides guidance on how to make quicker use of existing knowledge. The authors analyze the anatomy of ideas and recognize six principles that can make our ideas more likely to stick. The principles are listed under the mnemonic “SUCCEs”:

- Simplicity
- Unexpectedness
- Concreteness
- Credibility
- Emotion
- Stories

In this article, I will review these principles and suggest how they might be applied to the idea of barefoot horses.

### 1. SIMPLICITY

How do we change attitudes? A crucial way is by “example. example, example,” a variation of the house seller’s mantra, “location, location, location.” With the help of barefoot trimmers, educated horse owners have been providing this example for a decade (5).

But how do we do it through the power of the written word? First, don’t “bury the lead.” Find the core of the idea and state it up front. For example, a horse’s hooves should expand and contract with every step. They can’t do this if the hoof walls are clamped with hoops of steel and “crucified” with seven nails.

Although there are dozens of reasons why it is a good idea to remove the shoes, communication research indicates that less is more. Two reasons are more likely to be remembered than a dozen. For example:

- **FLEXIBILITY:** The hooves should expand and contract with every step
- **MOBILITY:** The horse should be on the move most of the day

### 2. UNEXPECTEDNESS

Use the element of surprise to get attention. To maintain it, point out the gaps in knowledge and thereby generate curiosity to keep the pages turning.

Satire relies on the unexpected, such as Jonathan Swift’s description of the talking horses and the yahoos in *Gulliver’s Travels* (6). I tried my hand at

satire to ridicule the Bronze Age idea of biting (22). The practice of shoeing is equally bizarre and fair game for ridicule. For a prime example of satirical humor in aid of equine welfare, see Michelle Guillot’s SuperPrix website at [http://pixofthelitter.net/pixofthelitter\\_007.htm](http://pixofthelitter.net/pixofthelitter_007.htm). The same author and artist has created “Felicity Wraithbottom’s Blog” on dressage, starting in the May issue 2008 of the online journal *Horses For Life* ([www.horsesforlife.com](http://www.horsesforlife.com)).

But building on the core idea above... horses’ hooves should expand and contract with every step, because each hoof acts as a supplementary pump for the circulation of blood. A horse has at least five hearts, one in the chest and one in each foot.

### 3. CONCRETENESS

Beware of using abstract terms and, as much as possible, use concrete images that conjure up something that can be touched, seen or heard. The “images” may be in words or pictures. As Napoleon may have said, “A good sketch is better than a long speech.” Cartoons add “concreteness” to conceptions. I believe that photographs can remind us that shoeing a horse, like footbinding a girl, deforms the skeleton.

Joe Camp suggests a line that is splendidly “concrete” and increasingly relevant: *Save money and save your horse at the same time*. When the welfare argument is not enough, perhaps the barefoot program’s cost-effectiveness might impress.

But building again on the core idea: a horse’s hooves should expand and contract with every step to reduce the load on the heart, but also to act as shock absorbers at the trot or faster paces. Horses should be in some sort of motion for most of the 24-hour day. In my view, a stable is a prison cell, and—for a mammal as large as a horse—a very small cell. The standard “cell” for a horse is equivalent to incarcerating a man in a telephone kiosk (Figure 1).

### 4. CREDIBILITY

How do we make people believe our ideas? Can we cite any figures of authority by way of expert witnesses? External credibility is always effective. Internal credibility works well for some “try before you buy” approaches (such as a money-back warranty), but such a pitch is not applicable to the barefoot program, in which, after years of shoe-induced deformity, rehabilitation can be lengthy and difficult. One could ask horsemen a question that would encourage them to test the credibility of the idea for themselves—*which would you rather trust, 60 millions years of tried and tested natural selection, or the crude and impertinent selection of some anonymous Saxon?*

The word “impertinent” can be better understood with the help of a time line...



Artwork courtesy Michelle Guillot

**Figure 1. The author claims that the standard stable “cell” for a horse is equivalent to incarcerating a man in a telephone kiosk.**

A horse’s foot is a triumph of engineering. Starting with a four-toed mammal the size of a fox terrier, its design has been shaped by 60 million years of evolution. The one-toed modern horse (*equus caballus*) evolved about a million years ago. Let’s put aside the first 59 million years of development and reduce the last million to a 24-hour time scale. Within this period, modern man (*homo sapiens*) did not evolve until about 11:10 pm. He first domesticated the horse around 11:53 pm and did not start nailing iron clamps on its toes until some time after 11:58 pm. Attempts to improve the horse by selective breeding commenced about 17 seconds before midnight.

This perspective assures us that the horse’s foot today cannot be markedly different from the unshod foot of horses in the Greek and Roman armies.

### 5. EMOTIONS

How do we get people to care about our ideas? Belief in an idea (credibility) is not enough by itself; we also have to make them care. The *Made to Stick* authors recommend appealing to self-interest to get a message across—spell out “the benefit of the benefits,” and appeal to the user with the WIIFY (“what’s in it for you”) principle.

Yes, the unshod horse has increased circulation in its hooves and, therefore, increased sensory input for balancing and knowing where to put its feet. But what is the benefit of the benefit? What’s in it for you? And the answer might be, “*When your shod horse stumbles, you can be killed. Are you sure you want to take that risk?*”

Another argument could be framed on the likelihood that a shod horse has contracted heels and

pain in the navicular region. The question could be: “Do you want to have to replace your horse when it’s nine, because it develops navicular disease?”

The possibilities are endless. A similar question could legitimately be based on the increased risk of a shod horse developing laminitis. Don’t forget the importance of the “you” word. Don’t say, “When a shod horse stumbles, its rider can be killed” but, “When your horse stumbles, you can be killed.”

The increased traction of the barefoot horse in all conditions can be appealed to: “Imagine not having to worry about snow balling-up in your horse’s hoof” or “Imagine reducing the risk of your horse slipping on the road,” etc.

Although a four-year-old Chinese girl with bound feet might have survived into adolescence and married, she was increasingly crippled as an adult and her life shortened. So it is with the shod and stabled horse, in my opinion. Solitary confinement is bad enough for a herd animal but, in addition, the shoe acts like a slow poison. Its worst effects become apparent in maturity, when a horse becomes crippled with laminitis or navicular disease.

Again, communication research tells us that a negative argument frequently has a more powerful effect than a positive one (21). Rather than stressing the benefits of the barefoot option, it is better to frame the discussion to focus on the penalties of shoeing. Be negative about the option you don’t want people to select.

However, Jones and Motluk (21) warn that some emotions, such as guilt and fear, have to be used with care. If an owner is made to feel guilty about shoeing her horse, this may stiffen her resistance to the barefoot program. If she is frightened of upsetting her farrier or of making the necessary management changes to transition to barefoot, the same will happen. Similarly, when talking to an iron-loving farrier about the barefoot program, he may begin to fear for his livelihood; if so, one can expect a brief dismissal. It is better in this case to make the WIIFY argument that the barefoot program will actually increase his income.

Whereas the scare tactics of guilt and fear are risky strategies, invoking anger is apparently a seriously underrated tool of persuasion (21). But the anger, of course, has to be directed at someone other than the persuader. Slow-moving organizations like the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) and the racing industry are fair targets for anger. It may be asked why both continue to mandate the use of shoes when, in my view, a more humane and physiologically acceptable option is available?

Resistance to an idea is itself an emotion, and one that must not be underestimated. You may be inclined to call it stubbornness, but the person to whom you are talking may call it loyalty. The fact remains that even the most logical and compelling



**Figure 2. What happens when an unnecessary addition is made to an invention, which pays no respect to the thought and ingenuity invested in the original design?**

of arguments are resisted. Reason alone is not enough.

Plato wrote about sophists who strengthened their arguments by appealing to emotion, and Hume recognized that “Reason is a slave to passion.” We don’t just reason, we reason with passion. Flanagan agrees, “we don’t just think, we combine thought with emotion—let’s call it ‘fthinking’” (23).

If pure logic is successfully resisted, the person resisting concludes that their own arguments must be even stronger (21). Once again, the WIIFY principle is useful to avoid such an impasse. Find an edge. Find some aspect of the argument that does appeal to your target’s views, then move towards your goal a little at a time. Try charm. Avoid making people feel bad about themselves. If you can boost their self-esteem they will be more receptive to your message.

Invoking self-interest should not stop at the level of appealing to the more basic human needs, such as safety and financial economy. Appeals can be made to many people’s desire to show affection and compassion. Increasingly, owners are keener than ever to improve the quality of life of their much-loved horse.

One can appeal to an owner’s wish to achieve esteem, to learn more, to enjoy beauty, and reach their full potential in an endeavor that interests them and in which they can make some contribution. This last phrase is the true source of happiness. Because of this, it is also one of the most powerful foundations for an appeal.

## 6. STORIES

**Black Beauty**, by Anna Sewall (1877), was not the first book to be written about animal welfare, but it was the first story book. The **Essay on**

Artwork courtesy Michelle Guillot

**Animals** by Horace Bushnell (1802-76) and the book **Bits and Bearing Reins** by Edward Fordham Flower (2nd edition, 1875) had some impact, because they influenced Sewell, but it was not until she wove their message into a story that attitudes began to change, and progress was made.

Joe Camp’s book (21) uses “emotion” to show people how they can improve their own life and that of their horse. He does this by telling stories. He believes the best stories are always founded in conflict. And the conflict does not always have to be overcome; the story is the struggle.

Stories prepare us to act faster and more effectively. As part of this, they can be powerful persuaders in the business of getting people to accept new ideas; they are wonderful teaching tools. As Chip and Dan Heath explain, stories are “flight simulators for the brain.” The most inspiring stories do not even have to be created; they simply have to be recognized when they occur in real life—recognized and recorded on the spot (carry a notebook and pencil).

The Heaths recognize three basic story plots: challenge, connection and creativity. In the barefoot world, all three plots occur, again and again—for example, the triumph-of-willpower-over-adversity, and the underdog story (the challenge plot); the help-in-the-time-of-distress and the building-a-relationship story (the connection plot); and the problem solving and mental breakthrough story (the creativity plot). As Mr. Camp points out, all three are really conflict plots.

The problem with a factual message and logical reasoning (the sort that most scientists tend to generate) is that it hits the listeners between the eyes, and they instinctively respond by fighting back. If I inform a rider of a shod horse that she is being cruel, this will make her defensive and angry. But if I tell her a story about a rider who has been inadvertently cruel out of ignorance, who came to recognize her mistake and removed her horse’s shoes with wonderful results, she will identify with the heroine, and be more likely to follow suit.

The following is a sort of fable that further emphasizes man’s impertinence...

What would the genius inventor of a supersonic plane say if, after having spent a lifetime designing, developing and testing his plane, it was subsequently encumbered by some non-engineer with a crude addition that paid no respect to the thought and ingenuity that had already been invested in the original design? Imagine a pair of dustbins being welded to the underside of the precisely engineered wings of his supersonic plane. For “genius inventor,” read evolution. For “plane,” read horse. For “dustbins,” read horse-shoes (Figure 2).

Real life stories are still the most effective. Thousands of healthy, barefoot horses are still liv-

(cont. on page 10)

Artwork courtesy Michelle Guillot



**Figure 3. A humanitarian and educational equine association in Switzerland reports that its pupils—mostly girls aged between 10 and 16 years—are vocal about horse wellness. The association's president claims, "They just cannot stay quiet when they meet other young riders using ironed hoof and mouth horses, accusing them of cruelty and being prehistoric-minded people."**

(cont. from page 9)

ing today that faced a likely sentence of death, when shod, because they were unworkable.

In the summary of *Made to Stick*, the authors explain that these stories are almost always concrete. Most have emotional and unexpected elements. The hardest part is making sure they are simple, and that they reflect your core message. A credible idea makes people believe. An emotional idea makes people care, and the right stories make people act.

One factor is yet missing from the six principles; time. We must be patient and plan to live long, if we want to see the full flowering of the barefoot movement. As Thomas Paine observed in 1776, "Time makes more converts than reason."

### CONCLUSIONS

We need to educate the next generation of riders, veterinarians and non-ferrous farriers ("catch 'em young"). Perhaps talk to members of The Pony Club and 4H groups. Youngsters are not squeamish about changing the attitude of others. At that age, they can get away with being mercilessly direct.

A recent email from the president of a humanitarian and educational equine association in Switzerland tells the story. He explains how the association tries to play fair and avoids putting too much pressure on adult "iron-lovers." Instead, it gives them time to learn the difference between tradition and science (15, 19, 24). His pupils, however—mostly girls between 10 and 16 years old—are not so tolerant. "It is incredible," he writes, "how this new generation is sensible to horse wellness. They just cannot stay quiet when they meet other young riders using ironed hoof and mouth horses, accusing them of cruelty and being prehistoric-minded people. It is so funny!" (Figure 3).

Such refreshing attitudes in the younger genera-

tion will make a difference. Education is the only way to improve acceptance of the theory of evolution, and it is also the only way to promote the application of advances in equine welfare. Education, a word derived from the Latin root *dux*, meaning "leader," should employ all of Heaths' six principles to get the facts across.

Curiously, unlike the situation with the theory of evolution—which is well accepted by scientists, but has yet to convince the general public—it is the other way around with the theory of barefoot management. As veterinarians, we have to ask ourselves why it is that the horse owners are

accepting the theory in ever-increasing numbers and successfully putting it into practice, yet our own profession and farriers, as a group, are resisting change?

I hope that I am misinformed and would love to hear that I am, but I know of no school of veterinary medicine in any part of the world that has updated their curriculum on the horse's foot to include the paradigm change from shod to unshod.

Many schools have farriers on their staff and, again, as far as I am aware, none of these farriers have hung up their hammers. Where is the leadership that students have a right to expect? Research funding on the horse's foot is still being awarded to workers who appear to be unaware that the horseshoe is the major cause of the two most serious scourges of the horses foot, navicular disease and laminitis. The "knights of the naked-hoof" are not invited to speak at veterinary conferences, and their articles are rejected for publication when submitted to peer-reviewed veterinary journals. The majority of horsemen's journals still advocate shoeing.

Unlike the situation with evolution, there is one group of people in the horse world that possesses the authority to legislate acceptance of proven scientific advances. These are the committee members of organizations that make the rules for horse sports, such as the FEI, national federations like the British Equestrian Federation and the United States Equestrian Federation, and the stewards of racing. Rules can and should be changed. And they should be changed now, not in a hundred years. It is unacceptable that current rules on equipment mandate cruelty. An example was set in February 2008, when the South African National Equine Federation became the first to approve the introduction of bitless dressage classes at graded dressage shows. The approval was given on a trial basis for one year, but it is a wel-

come start to welfare reform.

We need to set a target. We should aim to have at least some horses competing barefoot and bitless by the time of the 2012 Olympic Games. But before we, as a profession, can help achieve this target, we have to be persuaded of the need for reform in equine welfare. Seven years have passed since I first alerted equine veterinarians to the need (5). Let's make an Olympic effort. 🌱

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Joe Camp for his constructive critique of earlier drafts. For the cartoons in aid of persuasion, I am grateful to Michelle Guillot, stage designer, writer, illustrator and life-long horse-woman. Cheryl Henderson, president of the Oregon School of Natural Hoof Care kindly provided the photographs published in the first article.

**About the author:** Robert Cook FRCVS, PhD is Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University, North Grafton, MA, USA, and Chairman of Bitless Bridle Inc. Email: drcook@bitlessbridle.com

### REFERENCES

References are listed in year order. Those with an asterisk are available online at [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com)

1. Jackson, J (1997). "The Natural Horse." Star Ridge Publishing, Harrison, AR
2. Strasser, H.(1998). "A Lifetime of Soundness: The keys to optimal horse health, lameness rehabilitation and the high-performance barefoot horse." Sabine Kells. Qualicum Beach, BC, Canada
3. Strasser H: (1999) Shoeing: A necessary evil? Ed: Kells S. Sabine Kells, PO Box 44, Qualicum Beach, BC Canada V9K 1S7
4. Strasser H and Kells S: (2001) The hoofcare specialist's handbook: Hoof orthopedics and holistic lameness rehabilitation. Sabine Kells, PO Box 44, Qualicum Beach, BC Canada V9K 1S7.
5. \*Cook W.R (2001) "Educated Owners and Barefoot Horses; an open letter to veterinarians." *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*, 21, 471-473
6. \*Cook, W.R (2001). "On Talking Horses: Barefoot and Bit-Free." *Natural Horse Magazine* 3, 19 & 43
7. Strasser H and Kells S (2002): "Listing of the harmful effects of shoeing." Available at [www.thehorseshoof.com/listing.html](http://www.thehorseshoof.com/listing.html).
8. Jackson J (2002) *Horse owners guide to natural hoof care*. Star Ridge Publishing. Harrison AR
9. Jackson J (2002) "Founder: Prevention & cure the natural way." Star Ridge Publishing. Harrison AR
10. Strasser H (2003): "Who's afraid of founder?: Laminitis demystified." Edited and translated by the publisher, Sabine Kells, Qualicum Beach, BC Canada
11. \*Cook, W.R (2003) "Professional Dismissiveness of Equine Barefootedness." *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*, 23, 564-566
12. \*Cook, W.R (2004) "Horseshoes Totally Indefensible." *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*. 24, 266
13. Shaughnessy AF and Slawson DC (2004). Easy ways to resist change in medicine. *British Medical Journal*. 329: 18-25