

to that I had chosen. Sometimes, it even changes the font colour, and places the sentence at the start of the line, rather than centred. Why? I really wish I knew! Matt says that this is 'predictive text,' but I can tell you that what Word comes up with is not in any way, shape or form predicting what I want! The only thing that can be predicted with any certainty is that I will curse and ask Matt to sort it out!

Each of our work activities needs advertising, so this ends up being quite a lengthy and frustrating process. Oh well, at least when it's done that's it for another year. Now I only have to worry about how effective the adverts will be. You can see how annoying I find this: I am supposed to be writing about horses and I've been sidetracked!

#### INTRODUCING THE HORSES

So, on to the horses, Charlie and Star: strong and hardy; sweet-natured and happy. I love their strength and size: Charlie has really good, thick bones and long, rangy legs with big, strong muscles, despite being retired for the last few years. Star is more elegant and graceful, but just as strong and capable. The sense of power and ability that can be discerned from looking at them is amazing, and seeing them play and gallop is just magical. They are so inspiring; I could watch them all day.

My horses are calm, reliable, and predictable in their behaviour. They make happy, contented, 'purring' sounds throughout the day. I often hear them purring to themselves; it sounds like

*And here's Charlie, my big, strong boy ... (Courtesy Andy Francis)*



## A tale of two horses



*Preparing for a play session with Charlie and Star. Such a lot can be learnt through play.*

training. Just as we continue to learn throughout our lives, so, too, do all animals. Teaching them how to understand, interpret and react to new situations is not only rewarding to them, it also provides the tools they need to behave appropriately, and without undue anxiety or stress.

The best way to teach your horse is by employing the win-win approach I talked about earlier, which is so easy to do.

- **DECIDE WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO TEACH**

There is no point in working your horse without an objective, as he will struggle to understand what it is you want and may do the wrong thing.

- **BREAK TRAINING INTO SMALL, MANAGEABLE STEPS**

All behaviours and movements can be broken down into steps that make learning easy, and get you from A to B without difficulty. Remember how earlier I talked about my future goals for Charlie and Star, and how I intend to achieve these.

- **TEACH EACH STEP UNTIL YOU ARE SURE IT HAS BEEN PROPERLY LEARNT; ONLY THEN MOVE ON TO THE NEXT**

Each step should consist of the perfect example of what you are teaching. So, if you are teaching your horse to wait and not mug you for his treat, then you need to teach him this until he is calmly waiting with his head in a position you would like, maybe looking

forward. If you are at the stage where he can wait, but he is finding it hard to keep his nose away from the treats, you are not ready to move on yet. Moving on before he has learnt the step correctly will mean that things fall apart later.

- **IF YOUR HORSE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND, MAKE IT EASIER FOR HIM TO DO SO**

How many steps are there from A to B? As many as are necessary for your horse to understand what's being asked of him. Break down the steps to allow him to do this.

Remember, win-win, which means that both you and your horse should regard training as a good thing, and take away something positive from it. It also means that if you make each training session a pleasant and successful time for your horse, he will always be happy to try things, behave well, and do as you ask.

Indie is a perfect example of this. He doesn't understand how to be naughty, or ignore me and not come back when we are out; to take something he's not supposed to; to go where I tell him not to. Since he arrived at nine weeks old we have been training; every single point has a purpose. To Indie it is just fun and play, with some concentration and new experiences, but everything I teach him is instrumental in making Indie capable of looking after himself, be reliable, and also happy. I do not run around after him all day trying to prevent his getting into trouble, or doing what he shouldn't: he simply doesn't do those things.

And the magic ingredient? Win-win training.

The reason Indie is always successful is because I adjust his training so that he doesn't fail. If something is too difficult for him I make it easier; if something is not understood, we try a different way. And if Indie's mind is not on the task in hand, or it seems he might be interested in something I don't want him to be interested in, I'll do something that makes him wag his tail and focus on me. Indie has grown up with no idea of how to change his behaviour to avoid me, sneak about, or do his own thing when I am not looking, which is what so

many dogs do. It simply is not in his repertoire of behaviour, and nothing he has ever experienced, so he simply hasn't learned to do it.

Obviously, I have had the opportunity to train Indie in this way for most of his life, apart from those first nine weeks when he was with his mum, but it's never too late to begin training. If unwanted behaviours have become established, teaching those that you do want should allow them, in time, to gradually replace the unwanted behaviour.

### ADJUSTING FOR SUCCESS

I get some surprised-looking clients when I say that if our horses don't understand what it is we are asking, or do the wrong thing, this is our fault and not theirs, but it's true. As his teacher, if our horse does something different to what we ask of him, we need to determine why that is, and correct or adjust our approach. (I'm assuming that, as you've read this far into my book, you do not subscribe to the outdated and erroneous notion that adjusting your behaviour will allow your horse to be dominant, and take advantage of you.) Let's consider how our behaviour might affect our animal –

- **HAVE I BEEN UNCLEAR?**

Just because we know what we are attempting to communicate to our horse, it does not mean that we are doing this in a way that our horse understands.

- **HAVE I CHANGED THE CONTEXT?**

What a horse understands and is able to do in one place does not automatically translate to another. Learning takes in not only the actual movement or action, but also the environment, and where we might be positioned, or even what we are wearing, and what else happens in conjunction with that particular behaviour.

- **HAVE I ASKED FOR SOMETHING HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO DO?**

A horse cannot read minds, so expecting him to do something he hasn't been taught will obviously end in failure.

## A tale of two horses

entirely, I am likely to generate responses that I don't want, and will have the job of correcting these.

Of course, they are horses, but they are also individuals with consciousness and awareness of self, with a right to express natural behaviour, likes and dislikes, just as any other being does. It would be naive to overestimate what the equine brain is capable of understanding, which is why the study of animal behaviour should have a firm basis in neuroscience. I am assessing every step we take to ensure that I am not fooling myself, and expecting things that are not possible, but am instead seeing progression, development and understanding by my horses to the best of their ability.

### TIME WITH MY HORSES

Christmas will soon be upon us, and work is winding down for me as my clients are busy getting ready for the holiday, which means I am more able to while away the days with Charlie and Star (don't tell Matt!). I should be turning my attention to updating my website, leaflets, and another round of marketing, but those can wait.

I love Christmas, and even more so if it snows. We have a lovely week off work to cook, walk, and potter about the house. Work on a farm doesn't stop for Christmas, of course: there are always jobs to be done, and we all still need feeding, but I don't have to turn on the computer!

This evening Star asked for more grooming, which was a surprise, as she's not one for being stroked. I've taken to giving both horses a little groom when I give them their last lot of hay before we go to bed. It's just so lovely to spend a few minutes with them last thing in the evening, although I must remember not to stay out too long. The last time I did so Matt came into the stable looking somewhat distressed as I'd been gone so long, and he was worried that I'd been stamped to death or something similar (he has a vivid imagination). It was very lovely of him, but completely unnecessary as far as I was concerned, as Charlie and Star are so calm and sweet-natured compared to when they arrived, and I wouldn't take any risks, anyway.



Anyway, Charlie had a groom as usual, and Star purred as I groomed her, which is not usual. When I stopped, she asked for more by turning her head to look at me, doing this three more times in total before she'd had enough. This was the first time she had actively asked me to continue with something after I'd stopped – brilliant! – and a lovely warm feeling to go to bed with.



*Affection from Star: what a lovely end to the day! (Courtesy Andy Francis)*