



# INTUITION

## Can you trust it? Vicki Jayne Yates

If you genuinely feel in your heart and soul that something is wrong, it usually is. Most of us have experienced the feeling something isn't right. Culturally we are raised to look for facts and base our decisions on logic rather than instinctual feelings.

Intuition often gets shrugged off and dismissed as illogical but in my experience intuition, when balanced with knowledge, understanding and reason, can be a very valuable tool in horsemanship. Research shows our unconscious thoughts take up far more brain space than conscious thoughts. Conscious thought uses logic. Our unconscious mind is fed with lifelong experiences, knowledge, memories, creativity, understanding,

feelings and much more. The unconscious mind searches through these and connects things in a different way. It searches for references and patterns and can suggest a feasible course of action. In my opinion excluding this resource seems crazy.

It is nearly impossible for a horse owner, without the underpinning knowledge and experience which informs intuition, to use it for good decision making. Investing in learning and being informed is very worthwhile. Sometimes people in the horse world face ridicule in regards to their instincts and intuition if they look for advice in wrong places. Sadly some people place little value on seeking out quality professional advice, and the yard expert is often as far as it goes. Others look for answers on social media and the advice that gets offered there can be good, bad and ugly. Taking up this advice is a gamble, risky if

not dangerous and is how people can get into trouble very quickly and sometimes it ends badly. I see the end results. Time and time again I hear people say "I knew intuitively something was wrong, but I didn't know the answer so I asked for advice". But they made a bad call on who they asked. Even when the advice didn't sit right with their gut instinct they ignored that inner voice and followed what turned out to be bad advice. A good educator will always listen to what you tell them about your intuition as you know your horse better than they do.

Two legs or four, bodies give us early warning signs that not all is in tune. We are guilty in this modern age of brushing aside these signals, ignoring gut intuition and rushing along while not feeling right. The more you know yourself the more you will recognise these warnings. The better you know your horse the more

likely you are to spot subtle changes in him too. These are red warning flags. Ignore your gut intuition around wellbeing in yourself and or your horse and the little problems have a way of becoming big problems. Your horse will telegraph subtle messages that all may not be well and when not heard it can escalate into an awful situation.

Intuition is there to keep us from harm, to avoid danger and keep us safe. It is hardwired into all beings, it is ancient, biological wisdom. Equine or human we make decisions on first impressions, based upon social conditioning and beliefs. However when powerful emotions such as fear come into play a perceived fear can feel like a real fear and intuition will struggle to differentiate. So listen to intuition as it is there to keep you safe, but be mindful and check gut feelings against rational thinking

## Self-confidence blossoms when we let informed intuition guide decision making

using cognitive behavioural techniques to identify if it is a real or a perceived fear. Being safe around horses is about knowledge, experience and clear thinking not just intuition.

Empathy and compassion are reliant on intuition and gut feelings. Horses and humans have evolved as social creatures, living in families with friends with a language and etiquette. Both species are able to express emotions and read emotional signals without a sound uttered. To me, horsemanship is about empathy and compassion for the horse and a shared language. Listening to intuition and gut feelings helps you to be empathetic and be appropriate.

Horsemanship is much more than mastering techniques. As human or horse, when we learn new techniques we use the conscious part of our brains to process, to learn. This is to develop a muscle memory and to truly master technique. Once mastered, the technique becomes intuitive, requiring no conscious effort. So it really matters what we practice. Often my work is about undoing previous learning to replace it with a different technique. Then I have to shift someone from instinctively doing the wrong thing into being consciously aware of this. Then they are able to apply the new technique and master it.

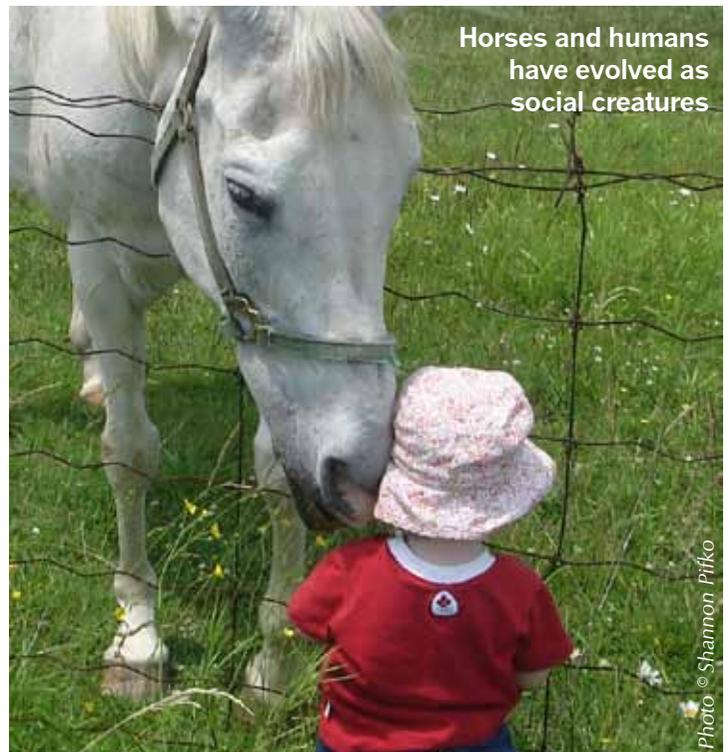
Once mastered this becomes intuitive. When you can do it, know you can do it, it works, you can trust your intuition.

Overthinking can kill performance and choke you. A busy brain struggles to hear intuition. Horsemanship is about interspecies dialogue. Once this is about reading each other on a very subtle level, the shared language is about a heart to heart connection and can become more about the two of you engaged in feel, instinct and intuition in your dialogue.

### INTUITION AND DECISIONS

It is possible to improve intuition and to use it as a tool to make better decisions which make life easier.

- Pause and think. If a gut intuition has surfaced remind yourself you don't have to make a decision in the heat of the moment. In most situations you have time to pause and think. Remind yourself this is an opportunity to listen to your intuition, to think, turn detective to go after your own thoughts. Once you have identified what your gut feeling is telling you (sometimes no easy task) you can then try to figure out what is the next step. It may be an opportunity to learn, to research the information you need from reliable sources, or ask for help from a respected equine professional. Look at the situation from different angles and different reasoning. This must include your horse's viewpoint. When you have identified the right thing the way forward will feel right.
- Listen to your inner voice. So you have made a decision but still listen to your inner



Horses and humans have evolved as social creatures

Photo © Shannon Pitko

voice. If you experience any discomfort with the decision and the path you have taken your gut intuition will act as a compass.

- Sharpen your intuition. The more you invest in knowledge the smarter and more accurate your intuition guidance tool gets. Having an intuitive brain isn't magic, or a gift, it is a strong force within us all. To be able to tap into intuition in horsemanship you must really understand horses, their psychology, how they think, what motivates them and how to engage in a meaningful relationship with them. It is about having an open, enquiring mind and a willingness to learn rather than blindly following advice from a convenient source. You need to value learning, be able to collect information from a number of highly respected sources, be analytical and make judgments based on facts and the latest thinking. There

are no quick fixes and no short cuts as this is lifelong learning. A wide knowledge base is best, as from this your intuition will select what is right. You need to know not just how to do something but why. Become aware of social conditioning and personal bias as these can create thought errors. The more you open up to intuition the more comfortable you will get with using it.

True intuition needs horsemanship to be open, honest dialogue. If you are receptive to feedback from your horse you will remove conflict. Instinct and intuition allow us to deeply experience the interspecies relationship and to become soul companions. Self-confidence blossoms when we let informed intuition guide decision making. When your intuition and heart speaks take notes.



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