

# Tracy Porter

## Article

### SETTING GOALS & HOW TO GET THERE!

By Tracy Porter

Why set goals? Goals help us reach personal milestones and to avoid becoming stagnant or complacent in our performance with our horse. But, just having the desire to accomplish a pretty lofty goal isn't enough to get us there. We must first set realistic and attainable goal or goals and then write down logical steps to follow to achieve each goal. In other words, have an all mighty goal, break it down into sub goals, (these are also steps to get to the all mighty goal). Then each sub goal can be broken down into steps. How long it takes to get through each step isn't a factor. The time it takes is just what it takes. If a horse has bad ground manners, that's where to start. It doesn't matter how long Joe Schmo has been riding him, if he is a leading nightmare, most likely he isn't any better (or safer) when we're on his back. Even if he can be ridden with kid gloves, eventually the "holes" in the horse will appear and will have to be fixed anyway.

All goals and the steps to get there must meet the following criteria:

- 1. I can't get hurt**
- 2. The horse can't get hurt**
- 3. The horse must be calmer after the lesson than before.**

#### ***Step One:***

*Make a goal, as detailed as possible. It's okay to have a lofty goal and shoot for the stars, but keep in mind that having smaller goals to achieve along the way will give a sense of accomplishment and positive reinforcement that you're moving in the right direction. But having a goal isn't enough! If we just jump in and start with working on our goal, we will be heading for disaster. Next make a list of things that the horse has to learn to meet that goal, these are sub goals.*

#### ***Step two:***

*Rearrange the list. Write your lofty goal down at the bottom of a piece of paper. Next, go to the top of the page, pick from your list, start out with the easiest thing you can teach. List each sub goal in a logical descending order toward your big goal at the bottom of the page.*

#### ***Step three:***

*Since little sub goals we wrote down, lead us to the big goal, our next step is to write down logical steps for us follow to teach each of the little sub goals. Beginning with the easiest step will insure that the horse will not fail. If you find a step too difficult, try rethinking and adding additional steps into your lesson plan. Since each step builds upon the previous one, the horse learns a pattern: us asking, and he searching for the yes answer to our question. We also have to realize that the student may regress (appear that they have no clue, yet they have done it before). This is a part of the normal learning pattern and cycle. When we recognize this, we need to back up to a spot where the horse can succeed and re-explain the lesson. Horses, like people go thru a series of highs and lows while learning. When they first appear to*

*have it, I see this but know that it is just a fluke...they have not a clue what I am asking for. Next they will start to get "bad" at the thing they are learning. Then will appear to be getting a bit better, then reality sets in and they are super horrible, after they are horrible they will start to get it and get better and so on...Then they get the thing I am teaching. The horse does not go thru this just once, but throughout their lifetime. Some phases are more noticeable than others. Generally when first working with a student the greener they are the pattern is more noticeable. As the student progresses, and their repertoire (so to speak) increases, this learning pattern does not seem so obvious. It easily takes tens of thousands of repetitions to get to the learned stage. That number may depress or even scare the fast food drive thru , I wanted it yesterday trainer in us. But I just think of how long I own a horse (we have quite a few in their upper 20 s and mid 30 s) and it really isn t so bad, rather it boils down to how dedicated do you want to be or how important it is to you and in some cases your safety! Our horse s performance is a mirror reflection of our understanding and dedication. Remarkably, in a lot of cases, they do quite well in spite of us!*

Let s try it now with a very normal, but basic goal.

### **STEP ONE:**

I have a yearling that has had a minimum of handling. I can get a halter on him if he is in a stall, but he stiffens his neck and lifts it as I pull the halter on him. I can hold his feet, he rapidly picks them up and will pull back, rip them away and slam them back on the ground. I can brush him lightly on some areas of his body, but he s really ticklish, especially from his girth area to his sheath. If I pull on the lead rope, I can usually get him to start moving. Most of the time he leads okay, but I wish he would stop when I do and not drag me off or clip me with his shoulder when he gets excited.

**MY BIG GOAL:** Next fall I d like to trailer him to a State Forest, camp and ride along the and in the Kickapoo River. I d also like to ride him along the road into town, have him wait tied up while I eat breakfast with my friends.

Since he s only a year and a half old, we may think we ve got all the time in the world to begin starting towards that goal. Nothing could be further from the truth. Here is a skeleton game plan that we can develop into a full-fledged plan.

### **STEP TWO:**

#### **MY SUB GOALS:**

- a. Round Penning (always keep in mind the age of the horse, adjust it to the individual horse!) The round pen is a tool for training, we use it to help us gain control of our horse not to condition or wear down our horse so he is ready to ride. The first part of round pen training includes 20 foundational steps. Once we have accomplished these steps we can move on to the next item.
- b. Sacking out
- c. Come to me cue
- d. Bathing with a hose
- e. Dropping the head cue with hands
- f. Proper haltering
- g. Learning to give to pressure of the halter and lead
- h. Leading skills
- i. Go forward cue
- j. Drop head cue in the halter
- k. Proper bridling with a rope bit
- l. Proper bridling with real bit
- m. Giving to the bit
- n. Picking up feet
- o. Holding feet
- p. Picking out feet

- q. Simulating the farrier holding the feet
- r. Giving and dropping the head with the bridle
- s. Yielding the hip exercise (a continuation of teaching the horse to lead from above)
- t. Directional control exercise (for more responsiveness to the bridle as well as better control of the hips and the shoulders and the separation of them)
- u. Giving to the bit while mounted
- aa. Giving and dropping the head
- bb. Horse freely walking with us
- cc. Yielding the hip exercise while mounted
- dd. Movement around the round pen at all gaits while mounted
- ee. Repeat the above until we know we will have our first successful trail ride out in the world.

The above are all mini goals, each of these mini goals have specific steps. There are other mini goals we may need or want to add along the way. One lesson we may consider adding if our horse appears to be spooky or lacking in confidence would be spook in place work. It is always important that we are aware of where our horse is in our training program and that we don't ask too much that our horse is not prepared for. We must remain flexible and creative in our journey. We may recognize that we could add a step or steps that may help us get our horse through our program successfully.

### **STEP THREE:**

#### ***STEPS TO ACHIEVE EACH SUB GOAL:***

We take the first one of our mini goals and elaborate it into logical steps for example:

##### a. Round Penning:

We break down this first phase of round penning into 20 steps. These steps begin with step #1: getting the feet to move and ends at step #20: the horse riveting his attention on us no matter where we stand in the pen. Round penning, as well as other sub goals that are listed above, deserve the right to have an in depth article solely dedicated to each particular topic.

Well, go get your self some paper and sit down and write down a goal. When you think you have elaborated enough, have a friend read through it. When you're ready to start out on your quest, don't be discouraged if you find you are at a roadblock rethink and add steps! Once you have done a few lesson plans, your thinking will be clearer and will get easier! Good Luck and happy Goal Setting!

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