



# Approaching with Mindfulness

By Heidi J. Potter

You are heading out to catch your horse. Your thoughts are most likely filled with what awaits you once you get in the saddle. Maybe it is a nice stroll in the woods or a schooling session. Maybe it is a lesson that you have planned or moving the cows from one pasture to the next. Whatever your endeavor might be, rest assured that your equine friend probably won't be thinking the same thing.

Because horses live in the moment their minds will most likely be quiet. They may just be enjoying the morning sun, snoozing in their shelter or grazing in the pasture peacefully alongside their friends. While we have grand ideas about what lies ahead, our equine partner most likely will not.

One of the most valuable gifts our horses give to us is the idea of living in the moment. To help us understand our horses better we need to clear our minds of all thoughts about the past or the future. We want to focus on being in the present and approaching him in a mindful manner.

Take a few big, deep breaths before you head out to get your horse. Allow the breath to travel through your body. Upon exhaling, release all tension and let your mind become calm. When you see your horse, take a second to connect with him. Think about what he may be feeling. Become aware of all that surrounds him. Observe his body language for a minute. Get a sense of how he is responding to your approach, to the other horses and to the environment around him. When you do approach him, do it mindfully. Say "hello" instead of just going up and putting his halter on. Give him a rub on the withers and down his back. Scratch his sweet spot. Allow him the pleasure of your touch and being in your presence. Then "ask" him for permission to put the halter on. Wait for him to turn his head and show that he is ready.

Breathing, connecting with the moment and approaching your horse mindfully will help to ensure a more pleasant experience for you both. Likewise, practicing this during the time that you are away from your horse is also of great benefit. Remembering to breathe and relax during busy or stressful times throughout your day will help you tremendously. Taking a few deep breaths will help you relax mentally, physically and emotionally. It will also greatly improve your overall awareness of the world around you. Regardless of where you are or what you are doing, your breath is your most powerful tool. So breathe, relax and enjoy living in the moment, just like your equine friend!