

---

2023 Get Gritty

# WINTER HORSEMANSHIP CHALLENGE

---



---

**LESSON 6:  
MIND-BODY  
CONNECTION**

---

# **USING YOUR BODY TO CONNECT WITH THE PRESENT MOMENT**



**"When our body language is confident and open, other people respond in kind, unconsciously reinforcing not only their perception of us but also our perception of ourselves."**

**-Amy Cuddy, Presence**

# POWER POSES

If you haven't heard of Amy Cuddy or seen her TED Talk, it is a must see! Amy Cuddy is a renowned Social Psychologist that studies how non-verbal behavior influences people. In her book, Presence, she describes how expanding your body expands your power, which is a useful technique to build your confidence before competing. Her research revealed that when we assume these "power poses" it changes the hormones in our bodies-namely, increasing testosterone and lowering cortisol. This research proved that our bodies influence our minds, and that we can use our posture to influence our emotions.

My favorite is the "Wonder Woman" Pose-standing tall, hands on hips, chin up and looking straight ahead.

You can practice this pose to increase feelings of confidence before you work with your horse.

Hold your favorite power pose for at least two minutes. Breathe deep, stand tall and proud. If you can do this in front of a mirror it is even more effective.

\*Bonus-repeat your favorite positive affirmation while you hold this power pose for extra oomph!\*



# **VAGUS GETAWAY (AKA JUST BREATHE!)**

Stuck in the fight-flight-freeze response? Not sure how to get out? Take a Vagus Getaway and Just Breathe!

Breathing. It is an automatic function of our bodies, that most of the time we aren't even consciously aware of. We don't need to think about it, we just do it. After all, if you didn't breathe, you wouldn't survive for very long.

The simple act of breathing does more than just bring air in and out of your lungs. By focusing on your breathing, you can reconnect with the present moment.

By focusing on your breathing, you can break out of the Stress (Fight-Flight-Freeze) Response, letting your body know that there is no immediate danger, and shifting yourself back to the Relaxation (Rest & Digest) Response.

I do get annoyed by people who scoff at the idea that focusing on and controlling your breathing can help shift you from fear to calm. "Telling someone who is feeling nervous or anxious to just breathe doesn't work," they say.

# **WHY PRACTICE BREATHING?**

I liken the practice of breathing techniques to one-rein stops.

Being able to pick up on a rein and bend your horse to a stop is a handy tool to have in your toolkit. For us to trust that our horse will stop when using this tool at any time, in any location, and at any speed, we recognize that we practice it a lot. The horse needs to be taught this response in a calm and controlled environment. It takes many, many repetitions for this to become an automatic response. Yet I have seen many riders just practice this once or twice, then wonder why it didn't work when their horse got spooked out on the trail.

Breathing exercises are the same thing. In order for a breathing exercise to work and help you shift from a high Stress or Fight-Flight-Freeze Response to a calmer Relaxation or Rest & Digest Response, you need to practice it before you need it.

Breathing exercises are simple. The key here is to practice them enough so that they are automatic, like a one-rein stop.

# **BENEFITS OF BETTER BREATHING**

If I haven't convinced you already that breathing exercises are important, here is a detailed list of the benefits of better breathing:

- **Reduces Tension**
  - Signals the rest & digest, relaxation response
- **Improves Posture**
  - Fast and shallow breathing leads to tipped forward, top heavy, crouching posture
  - Deep and relaxed breathing leads to lowered center of gravity, and a deeper, more secure seat
- **Increases Rider Stamina**
  - Increased oxygen available to body and brain leads to a rider with more stamina, reduced muscle fatigue
- **Relaxed and Focused Horse**
  - A rider that is calm and breathing correctly sends a confident message to their horse
- **Rhythm, Regularity, Even Tempo**
  - A rider that is breathing with a regular and even tempo encourages the horse's gaits to be rhythmic and regular
- **Clearer Thinking**
  - Your brain needs oxygen! It is just 2% of your body weight but uses 20% of your oxygen. Breathing correctly feeds your brain!

# **BREATHING TECHNIQUES**

## **Are you breathing correctly?**

Diaphragmatic, or belly breathing is the most efficient way to breathe. Place one hand on your belly, and the other on your chest, and take a deep breath. Which hand moves?

## **Square Breathing Exercise:**

Inhale to the count of 4

Hold for the count of 4

Exhale to the count of 4

Hold for the count of 4

Square Breathing is great for when you need to be focused, alert, and able to quickly respond.

## **5-2-7 Breathing Exercise:**

Inhale to the count of 5

Hold for the count of 2

Exhale to the count of 7

The longer exhale in this breathing technique is more relaxing. This technique is great for when you want to feel calmer.

# **INTENTION SETTING**

## **Intentional: done on purpose and with full awareness**

Every time we interact with our horse, we display our intent. As prey animals, our horses are especially sensitive to our intent. An example of our horse's keen ability to detect and interpret intent is my horses not batting an eye when my kids are playing, yelling, running and riding their bikes up and down the fence line. Even though the kid's loud and unpredictable actions should cause them to spook, the horses can sense that the intent and energy of the kids is to play, and therefore they don't interpret their actions as scary or predatory.

The most clear example of when our intent can affect our horsemanship can be seen when in the simple action of catching your horse. The end goal is the same-to get a halter on our horse. However, our intent, thoughts and energy as we do this simple task can vary and influence the end result.

As you approach your horse, are your thoughts on how happy you are to see your horse and positive thoughts of how much fun you are going to have riding today?

Or, are your thoughts that you hope your horse isn't hard to catch because you only have an hour of horse time tonight, and you want to get the most riding in?

If you were your horse, which intent would be more inviting to you?

# **INTENTION SETTING**

Practice setting intentions by taking a quiet moment when you pick up your horse's halter, before you open the gate the pasture or the stall door.

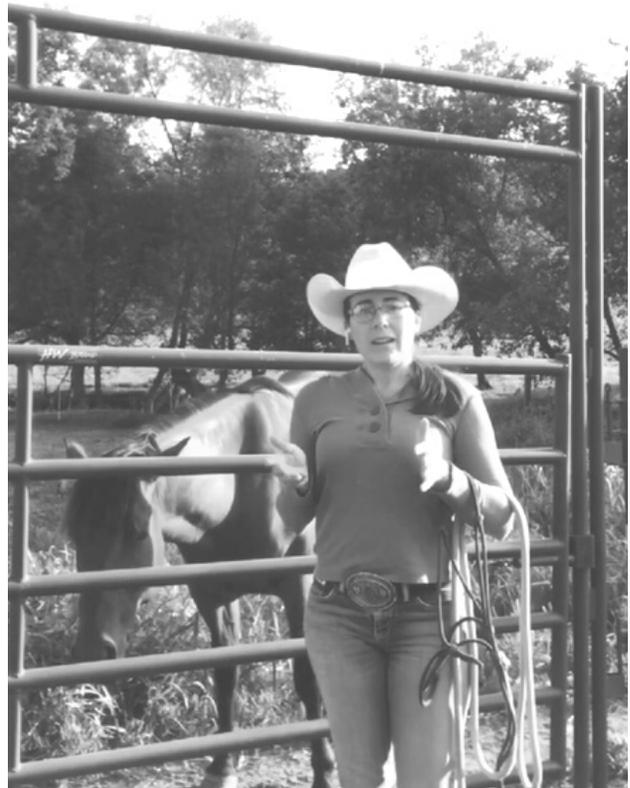
Take a deep breath in and out, and let go of the stress of the day. Bring yourself to the present, to the here and now.

Feel the halter and lead rope in your hands. Think of how grateful you are that you get to spend time with your horse.

Choose a word or phrase for your ride. It could be a word of how you want to feel, like confident, calm, connected. It could be a power phrase that energizes you, like "I am a clear leader for my horse." or "I am willing to stretch outside my comfort zone."

Take another deep breath, repeat your word or power phrase, then open the gate/ stall door and get your horse.

It is going to be a great ride!





[www.getgrittycowgirl.com](http://www.getgrittycowgirl.com)

Disclaimer: Working with horses can be a dangerous activity which can subject participants to serious injury. Siobhan "Chevy" Allen and/or Get Gritty with Chevy Horsemanship Life & Confidence Coaching is not liable for your equine activities. The information, instruction, and techniques provided in Chevy's online coaching materials may not be suitable for everyone. Personal instruction, as well as detailed viewing and/or reading of the materials is highly recommended before attempting these equine activities. Horsemanship Life and Confidence Coaching is not a substitute for professional mental health care or medical care and is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any mental health or medical conditions.

Hold Harmless Agreement: By viewing online coaching materials, I understand and am aware of the inherent risks associated with equine activities. I understand that Siobhan "Chevy" Allen is not acting as a mental health counselor or medical professional. I assume all risks associated in performing any of the activities explained in this lesson, and hereby release and hold harmless Siobhan "Chevy" Allen and/or Get Gritty with Chevy Horsemanship Life & Confidence Coaching, successors and assigns, from and against any and all claims, damages, and/or liabilities arising out of my attempts to perform any of the exercises or activities, including and without limitation any personal injuries or damage to my property which I may incur as a result of my attempts to to perform the activities or exercises explained in this lesson.