

## chapter five

# Handling principles and behavioral traits

**A**n old horse trainer once told an eager group of students, “None of you will be allowed to ride or handle the horses until you pass a simple test that has just one question.”

With that, he sat down on a bale of straw on top of a pulled horseshoe with nail stubs. He jumped up and asked the students “Why?”

After a moment or two of silence and blank stares, the students said the answer was simple: “Because it hurt.” But the trainer told them their answer was wrong. “None of you understand even the most basic premise of how to handle your horse properly.”

This isn’t a trick question. In fact I’ve asked this same question to many people and few give the right answer.

To help you understand the relevance of this question to livestock handling, consider this example. When I pick up the left rein and apply direct pressure to the left of a hackamore or snaffle bit trained horse, why does it tip his head calmly to the left every time I ask?

Most people say, “Because you pulled.” But that’s the wrong answer.

Some people say, “Because he knows you will keep pulling if he doesn’t.” True, in part, but still wrong.

The natural reaction of a calf or horse to a pull is to resist or pull the other way. Pull straight down on the halter rope under his chin quickly and firmly and see what he does. Keep your chin out of the way if you try this, because his head will fly up!

Try pushing on the hip of a gentle but untrained colt or calf. They will try to maintain their balance by resisting the pressure. They will push back.

If you walk straight toward the side of a cow, why does it calmly walk forward every time? The answer is the same as the horse giving to the bit.

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### **Principles are handling basics**

Livestock, especially cattle or bison, want so badly to get along with us, given the chance. The results of poor handling are animals that are on the fight, leave the herd, or charge the horses. The root cause is a lack of knowledge of the principles of handling livestock.

Principles describe how livestock learn and what guides their decisions. Principles determine when to quit pressuring or keep pressuring. They explain how animals perceive what you're doing and how to communicate with them.

In addition to principles, a rider must know some basic traits or personality type things about livestock—things we do that bug them and what we can do to help them be comfortable. Use of this knowledge will translate into gaining real control. Chapter Eight presents some ways of pressuring stock that riders will also need to know.

The following knowledge is essential to understanding how livestock learn. Using this information will help you get cattle to do what you want.

#### **Calmness—the starting and ending point**

Ed Techick, a hall of fame horse trainer and former cattleman, has a wooden sign with the word "CALMNESS" in big bold letters bolted to the door to the arena. Each student sees it every training day.

Calmness is a most important facet of gaining high control of cattle (and horses). You haven't won anything if you don't have calmness in animals after they do what you wanted. If you don't have calmness before asking an animal to do something, they will have trouble doing it or will overdo it.

Something is wrong if stock aren't calm after driving them through a gate or chute, into a trailer, or sorting one away from the bunch. It's either the animals' stage of understanding or your way of asking.

If you approach stock and see they can't be calm, you must work to get a measure of calmness before attempting to get them to do something.

Calmness starts in the handler and ends up in the animal. You must be calm around stock before their behavior will improve. If you are calm and stop chasing cattle, they will quit running away.

Another key to obtaining calmness is obedience. Once cattle learn they can easily obey your signals just by moving straight ahead at a walk, for instance, they gain a measure of calmness.

Quiet persistence in everything you ask them to do is the key to getting calmness in cattle and horses. So be calm and patient, at least a little more than the cattle are. Use only the right techniques. Persist with asking. Change if you are having the wrong effect, and wait until the right things happen. Cattle will understand there is a new deal very soon.

At first it takes a little while for cattle to realize they can control your pressure (prevent it from coming farther) and that you aren't going to get aggressive or forceful. This produces some calmness. They learn obedience is always profitable and get even calmer.

Cattle, though not to the degree of horses, are always looking to see if they should be or have to be in control, if they have to do what you ask, or have to act upon self-preservation.

Horses, especially young horses and stallions, almost constantly test us to see if they can get the edge and take the lead until it becomes confirmed in their minds, through experience, that

we are the absolute masters under any and all circumstances. Horses calm right down when they become sure you are the absolute master. I suppose this is so because they can quit trying to operate on their own.

Much the same, cattle will become calm if you are calm. They will start to trust and follow your signals. Getting this calm, responsive obedience has its roots in understanding all of the following principles.

### **Motivating cattle with pressure**

Cattle do something for us because we motivate them to. We motivate them to move predictably by moving around them the right way. They move or stop moving in order to keep us at a certain distance and to avoid increased pressure.

When we position ourselves and move exactly where the cattle need us to be in order to have them prefer to move the way we desire, this is correct pressure.

Cattle can take a tremendous amount of this type of pressure. A knowledgeable rider can dominate horses and cattle far more than a rough rider can. Riders who understand even basic ways of how to apply pressure and how animals learn get way more work done than those who just line up behind them and scare them in the right direction.

There are ways of moving around cattle that help us find where they need us to be to motivate them to act predictably. For lack of a better term, I'll call these "techniques." Calm cattle move naturally and predictably to these techniques. You must learn and adhere to them or the stock may not move like you want. Using the right technique gets them to turn right, speed up, slow down, stop, etc. How you apply pressure is essential to obtaining calm and highly responsive stock.



**Sorting a cow from her calf using correct pressure.**

Techniques are applied properly only when based on correct handling principles. These principles are very old, because cows are cows and always have been.

You can pressure stock to start or stop doing something. Proper handling will prevent such things such as stock taking side trails, veering from the herd, quitting the bunch, or fighting.

Here's an example of how to help a cow stop being rotten by pressuring the right way at the right time.

You have a cow that isn't tolerant or attentive to her calf. You have to put them together, and then she kicks hard at her young calf when it nurses.

Here's one idea on how to stop that behavior.

First, work this cow with proper handling until she works well for you. This alone may permanently cure the attentiveness problem with her calf. If she still kicks when nursed, put her in a pen. When the calf sucks, and she is thinking about kicking, pressure her head just the right amount to make her look at you, no more. When

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she looks at you, back off immediately. Then relax and wait. The calf is now sucking, but pretty soon the cow gets this kicking idea again. So you lean forward at her, and she looks at you.

This ends kicking, because cows are single minded. If she is concentrating on controlling you from coming closer by looking at you, she can't kick very well. Soon she learns her udder feels better after nursing.

The more traditional idea of whacking her on the head with a board when she kicks also works. I'm a fan of whatever works, but I like the pressuring idea better because it is less work for me and easier on the cow. Plus, whack a cow on the head a few times after you put her in a pen and see how easy it is to get her back in there!

### Pressure and release

Pressure, in itself, means "do something" to cattle or horses. They might decide to run for miles or calmly walk forward 20 yards.

Livestock want relief from pressure more than anything and want to be able to control it. Stress builds up in cattle when they can't find relief from pressure. Panic follows unrelieved stress. Cattle know this. Horses live by it all their lives. I can't emphasize the importance of this enough.

Applying pressure and releasing it correctly at exactly the right time is an essential part of getting animals to want to do (and repeat) something you want them to do—and then do it.

To get this reliability, we must get animals to want to do what we're asking by using techniques that help produce predictable responses. It is very important to release pressure when they do it right. When we release pressure determines whether what the animal just did was the "right thing" or not, in its mind.

Pressure should be applied using the least amount of movement required in order to get your desired response. For example, if you need an animal to move ahead and keep going, you walk in, pressure it to go, let it get a step ahead, then follow the movement and pressure again before it slows. Just as they begin to do it, you release the pressure.

This helps create lightness, life and responsiveness in the stock. They feel they have good control over releasing the pressure that you apply because you aren't in their way of doing it. It helps them be real sure about doing the right thing.

Cattle are their experiences, and they act based on those experiences. We create learning and predictable behavior in livestock by creating experiences in which they do what we want and get what they want.

Cattle don't reason. They gather and store vast amounts of experiences in their minds. Horses have a fantastic sensitivity to what is happening around them and a seemingly endless capacity to store these experiences all their lives.

It appears that cattle and horses store experiences in two main categories—profitable to them or not profitable.

For the most part, a handling experience for a cow consists of pressure, its response, finding relief from pressure, and some passing of time thereafter. This is explained further under the "End the lesson" principle.

Exactly what the animal was doing when pressure was released and some time passed determines how the animal perceives that experience in that setting, profitable or not.

As most of us require pay for our work, cattle also require a paycheck. Relief of pressure is part of their paycheck—a big part.

To ensure that stock want to perform behavior we desire, we must first get them calm enough to at least listen. Then we apply pressure they understand and allow some release of pressure at the exact moment they do what we wanted. Then we allow some peace and quiet in between, at least until they have learned that lesson.

The overall experience becomes that they can move naturally in the way they prefer to move when pressured in certain ways, and we quit coming.

Uncertainty or past experience leads frightened or anxious animals to find relief by running from a handler or trying to dive over a corral fence. They don't prefer to do that, and we don't want them to. So we have to give them a reason, time, and the ability to choose something else.

We must start with simple, positive responses where cattle do what they prefer to do, then find immediate relief from pressure as a result. This builds a foundation for changing cattle behavior. Proper use of pressure gets stock to thinking about doing something else.

### **The basic idea—**

#### **getting stock to do the right things**

Applying pressure and releasing it correctly is the key to getting an animal to want to do something specific—and to do it consistently under all conditions when we want.

It's natural for cattle to go straight ahead in response to direct pressure to their sides, to slow when we go up the sides with them, or to speed up when we go against the way they are facing. We don't have to teach them these things. They want to move this way when pressured correctly and when they are calm. All we have to do is create initial calmness and the experience that doing so results in relief.

Start training your sensitive animals with the lightest pressure required to get the desired result. Apply and release pressure just to show them it has a release, if you need to, without requiring them to do anything but stay put or look at you. Later, release the pressure only after they do what you want or even a part of it.

The faster you relieve pressure when they respond correctly, the faster they associate relief from pressure with exactly what they just did, given that you allow a brief period after to let it sink in.

The more precise your request and timing of the release, the more accurately they can respond. General requests get general responses.

Just as they begin to do it, release the pressure. This helps create responsive stock because you aren't in their way of doing it. It helps them be sure they are doing the right thing, which produces calmness.

To stop stock from doing something, don't ease the pressure when they are doing it. Certainly, never allow them soak time.

For example, a herd may set off at a run when I'm just standing quietly 100 yards away. This would be my mistake for being too close, initially, but there is a remedy. Stock like this have experienced relief from pressure and had some time pass after they ran away.

The remedy—let the animals go off a ways so they won't think I'm chasing them. I don't try to force them to stop. After they get 40 to 50 yards away, I just follow them. This way, I don't allow them time to experience that running away is profitable. I use their desire to keep me in sight (to see what's pressuring them) to slow them down.

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Following at the right distance is some pressure to stock, so I'll follow straight behind and ride a bit slower than they are going. They will eventually slow down or stop when they look behind to see me. When they do, I back off, which shows them pressure has an end and gives them time to assimilate that slowing produces relief.

With sensitive stock that haven't run off yet but might be thinking about it, I'll come so close they feel some pressure but not enough for them to move off. I back off before they move, which might be just as they look straight at me. They might think that looking at me controls the pressure and that all I wanted was to get that close. They learn they can stand still and nothing scary will happen.

Only later, after they have seen this, will I pressure so they need to move to get me to stop coming. They find they can also move and the pressure is off them.

Once they are moving off okay, I can ask for continued movement or a turn or slow down. They learn this program very quickly and get comfortable with it. True cow sense means we rely on their natural tendencies to get the responses we want.

### **Make a promise to your stock**

Make all of your stock a promise that you will never break: When they respond right, you will release pressure, every time.

You can pressure and release and still be forcing stock, so make sure it isn't used with force—only with quiet persistence. Your stock will then become calm enough so they can respond exactly how you pressured them to.

### **The answer to the question**

I hope every reader of this section on pressure and release can now answer the old horse trainer's question about why he jumped up when he sat on the shoe.

The real answer: "Because it stopped hurting when I jumped up."

### **Lessons**

Livestock need to have things broken into small lessons. Lessons are steps leading to, or parts of, what you eventually want them to do.

A primary objective when working cattle is usually to convince them that you aren't aggressive, won't force them or do things that bother them, and that pressure has a readily available release. You can't convince them of this if they run two miles every time you show up. So, you have to change how you show up.

For example, a single lesson with real sensitive stock could be approaching them by just standing far away and retreating (releasing pressure) before they get anxious enough to run away. Then stand quietly for a moment or two (end of lesson). Approach again and do the same thing to reinforce that pressure has a release and doesn't keep coming.

What separates the two as different lessons is the time interval between them in which you apply no pressure. If you don't move aggressively—and pressure carefully—most cattle learn after a few times that pressure has a release.

Another example: You want stock to move ahead and keep moving when you pressure them into their sides. These are two separate things to cows, so you have to break it down into different lessons. You pressure the cow into its side. It moves, so you stop coming. Then the cow slows and stops. This isn't everything you want, but that's okay. The cow experienced "move ahead, slow, and stop", is how you control the pressure.

You have to release pressure when the animal moves. You can't ask too soon for it to **keep moving** because that could confuse the animal (some sensitive ones) about what you want. And if you did, the animal would probably think that moving wasn't the right thing to do. It might search for relief by doing something else like running off or spinning around to look at you.

Remember that **time** separates lessons. Separate the two points—move and keep going—to allow the animal to experience and learn one thing at a time.

Once it moves ahead, you can then teach it to move ahead and keep moving. Ask it to move again, but this time pressure again exactly when the cow starts to slow. Now the cow is experiencing that she must move and keep moving to relieve the pressure. Practice this a few times. When timed perfectly, the animal quickly learns that pressure means move and keep moving.

The release of pressure and proper time interval is what is necessary to make it another learning experience or lesson. Usually the minimum time needed to wait is at least a few seconds. It is learned once the horse tips his nose left slightly every time you ask, and you can go to the next lesson.

This lesson could be to ask it to give with its nose and move his shoulder to the left. You apply left rein direct pressure and indirect pressure with the right rein. When it tips his nose left, you must give a slight release to tell "yes, that's

the right direction" but you want something in addition this time. Then hold him there until he moves his shoulder (left front foot) left. When he does, release pressure and wait a few seconds.

This is lesson two in giving to the bit or hackamore. Soon the horse learns to tip his nose in response to rein pressure and move his left shoulder.

### **End the lesson**

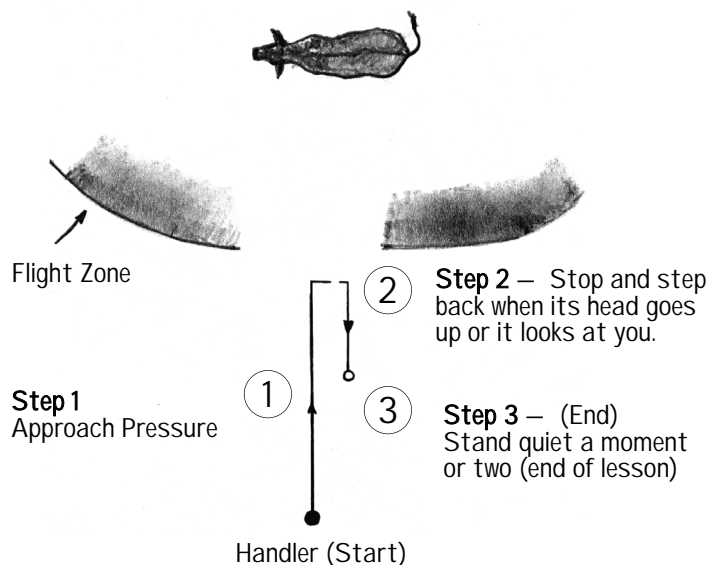
I have mentioned waiting a few seconds after releasing pressure when an animal does the right thing.

This is perhaps the most important scheme in the handling of livestock—all livestock. Creation of every experience an animal has in its life, every learned behavior, I term "a lesson."

"End the lesson" means that after you ask the stock to do something—and they do it right—you release pressure (which is the paycheck or reward) and keep from pressuring again for at least a short period of time.

This short time period is when animals have the opportunity to learn or experience whether what just happened was profitable or not. This time period could be for only a fraction of a second if the lesson was already learned, a moment or two if you are first teaching something, or for the rest of the day, as in the case of placing them.

## APPLYING “END OF LESSON” PRINCIPLE ON SENSITIVE STOCK



**Step 4** – Watch the animal— see that it is comfortable with this and then approach again, this time even closer.

**Step 5** – Turn back before it takes off.

**Step 6** – Stand quietly for a moment or until it is calm.

Repeat this approach and retreat until you can get close enough to work the animal effectively. Later, get the animal to move away from your pressure and end the lesson.

### Training

Ending the lesson is a tool to use when training, re-training or reinforcing something. Once animals understand what a certain pressure means and do it consistently, asking them to repeat it isn't a lesson so you don't have to end it.

Ending the lesson ensures that the animals clearly associate the release of pressure with the action they just did to get that release. This helps create a calm period after they respond and allows them to clearly assimilate what just happened. This calmness and time interval accelerates learning for the animals—and people.

Ending the lesson when they get it right also allows you to break more complex things into steps so you can get animals good with every part of something you want them to do.

### Re-training

Ending the lesson is also an important tool for correcting problems. If cattle know what you want but just don't do it because they don't feel like it or think they don't really have to, correct this with a training lesson. Keep quiet persistent pressure on them to reinforce the idea that they must respond or pressure will persist.

For example, I have some cattle that I want out the gate and onto a stubble field.

It's a real cold day and they are happy to stay put on their nice straw bedding. I pressure them to get up, and they just look at me. I keep up quiet persistent pressure—standing real close—so I don't let the animal end the lesson with a “no” answer. They get up, and I back off and wait. I give them time to stretch and urinate. When they are all up and ready, I ask them to move ahead and out of the corral.



The animals learn they need to go even if they don't feel like it, and that I will persist until they do. Cattle always respond to persistent pressure. They find it irresistible.

Don't let the stock end the lesson on the wrong note. If you have wild stock that are prone to running away, you need to work them so you can get closer and shorten the flight zone to where you want it. Approach, back off a step or two, then stand still before they take off. The approach is pressure, retreating is the release, and standing still a moment or two is the end of lesson. Approach back and forth in straight lines, edging closer each pass.

It is very significant to the animal that you back off instead of letting it take off first. If it took off and got rid of you for a time, it has the chance to form the experience that taking off and getting rid of you is profitable. Pressure was released by taking off, and the lesson ended on that thought. After a few times of the animal ending the lesson, it thinks it's the right thing to do.

Don't release pressure and end the lesson—or allow the **animal** to release and end the lesson—if it is doing other than what you asked or wanted it to do.

Never interrupt or terminate lessons on the account of wrongdoing or resistance by the stock—or for any reason that the stock could construe that way. This is especially important with horses, but I use this scheme in working stock all the time.

Sometimes it's impossible to prevent animals from releasing pressure before you want; for instance, when you jump some cattle and spook them. Properly following stock that run away avoids ending the lesson there and keeps it from becoming a learned experience.

So if they take off, follow them—not too close—and go slower than they are going. This will put enough pressure on them so they know that running won't get rid of you. Done right, they won't feel pressured to keep going either. When they slow or stop, end the lesson there.

The principle here is that you are keeping the same lesson by following them. You are not allowing them the time to experience that taking off and running is the right thing to do when approached. You are showing them it isn't profitable to run by following persistently until you get a change in their behavior. Help the behavior change by following in their blind spot so they will want to turn, which will prompt them to slow. The stock will quickly understand this and calm down, allowing you to pressure them again and get a calmer response.

The longer an animal takes to understand your pressure, the longer the ending of the lesson wait should be. With real sensitive animals that have been handled wrong, I wait longer so they have more time to relax and get calm.

When animals are conditioned to pressure (now pressure is really only a cue), you can discontinue ending the lesson to save yourself time.

Ending a lesson when teaching an animal to move away from pressure by approaching its side could mean giving it a few steps after it moves off before you pressure again. You could stand there or even ease back a little after it responds to make it even clearer.

Ending the lesson means if you ask an animal to turn to the right (when you step out wide to the left side behind it) and it turns, you quit pressure and don't pressure it to turn again for a few seconds. It could also mean that after placing a herd, you leave them completely alone for the rest of the day. Once you pressure and the animals respond, release and end the lesson correctly.

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When you pressure again, this becomes a whole new lesson, because pressure has been separated by time. The new lesson can build on a previous lesson or it might be a new movement entirely. Regardless, the animal views it as a new learning experience and will add it to its memory and act on how it cataloged the results the next time you handle it—profitable to do or not profitable to do.

### **Step by step examples: Lessons and end the lesson**

Livestock learn to trail as a herd and horses learn to load in a trailer by first learning all the little things that comprise that task. To drive well, cattle must first be comfortable with going straight ahead when pressured. Then they learn to go and keep going. Then to speed up, slow down, stay together, stop, and so forth.

Now, when I say we need to teach animals with lessons to go, stop, turn, or speed up, we aren't really training cattle to do these things. Calm cattle will already do them. We have to be sure, however, that they are calm and comfortable enough with our handling to be able to do these things. It's a good check on whether you are working in the right places to be able to prompt them to do what you want.

Here is a simple example of progressing with a herd with step by step lessons.

We need all our cattle to go straight ahead when pressured into their sides. Our objective is to get them to walk straight ahead and keep going a reasonable distance. When first handling a cow of average disposition, do the following:

Pressure a cow into her side. As she walks straight ahead, quit pressuring (halt and just stand there a few seconds). She moves off about 10 yards and stops and looks back at us. By halting and waiting a few seconds (ending the lesson after she moved straight), the lesson for the cow is that pressure has a release and walking straight

ahead and moving off 10 yards is the way to get it. She gained by moving straight ahead, but she chose to move only 10 yards.

We might wish that our cattle went straight ahead and kept going farther than that. She stopped too soon for our liking, so the next lesson is to keep going farther. The lesson starts this way:

Pressure her into her sides and she walks ahead 10 yards, but this time you follow her a bit and then come in again, just as she thinks about slowing. She keeps going, and now the lesson is that walking straight ahead and continuing farther than 10 yards is profitable. Repeat this a few times, and it becomes experience. Your cow learned that walk straight and keep going is the thing to do.

Stock can learn "bad" things too. If your stock run through a gate after driving them through it and they get off and away from you for a short time in which there is no pressure, the lesson they experienced is that running through gates is profitable and it's the thing to do next time. Horses are very quick to pick up bad habits this way, except that to a cow or horse, they aren't bad habits. Only they gain or they don't.

If you followed these cattle right up after they ran through the gate and turned or slowed them, the lesson learned is that running through the gate isn't profitable.

All livestock learn to do what their experience has shown will profit them. Unless forced, they won't do what experience has shown is not profitable.

So, whenever you first obtain the correct response from an animal, end the lesson by not persisting in pressuring for at least a few seconds. You can back off or let the animal move off to relieve pressure. Repeat until lessons are learned.

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You can end the lesson for an hour or a day, but there must be some interval of time between lessons. Some horse trainers call this “soak time.” The “end the lesson” principle explains a little more in depth why and how “soak time” works.

### **Train stock where you can**

Animals can't learn or experience positive lessons from us if they aren't calm enough to respond without feeling they should act upon their instinct of self-preservation. Sometimes even skillful attempts at calming stock will fail if you're working them while they feel too confined, real hungry, hot and scared, or tired.

If stock are wild and unresponsive in a certain setting, then go to a place where they are able to pay more attention to shorten training time. Some will have difficulty paying attention and learning if they are in a confined area such as a corral where you are always within their flight zone. Work them in a bigger corral or pasture.

For the fastest results, get your stock working for you at a time and place when they will be most responsive.

Training stock initially on steep mountain range is difficult, because terrain limits use of some techniques. Cows and calves can separate in the willows. They can run over the hill and hide out, veer off into the swamp, or stay in the creek bottom.

If you can, train stock to handle well for you in a more suitable area prior to turnout. Presenting riders with a trained herd at the beginning of the grazing season will help reduce stress, because they have a herd that handles well from the start.

Stock concerned about being in a corral and pressured can sometimes learn that pressure has a release (you will only come in so close) by working them from a position outside the corral.



Work cattle in an easy place when you're first starting out.

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Some stock can be too stressed to learn well when worked alone. If an animal isn't responding well when worked individually, then work it with a group of animals until it can be worked alone.

If stock don't respond calmly to good handling within 10 to 15 minutes (suppose they stay flighty and nervous or improvement is slow), go to a different setting and work from there. You are not "letting" animals get away with anything by accommodating their fears and stress by putting them with others or in a better training area. You are helping them understand what you want and to respond well in a reasonable time-frame.

Livestock, especially cattle, are easy to work when you understand some basic aspects of behavior because they want so badly to get along with us, given the chance.

The following traits and characteristics are essential to understanding cattle and letting them give us natural responses.

### Essential cattle traits

#### Flight/pressure zone

Pressure only has meaning to stock when the handler or dog gets close enough to prompt them to respond. When you are operating within this zone, everything you do affects the animal. If you're within this zone, they will move, slow, stop, or turn. If you're outside of it, they won't.

Although I dislike the term "flight zone," it has become the established way to describe when animals move from something like a predator or dog when it gets too close. The distance at which they run away is the "flight zone."

This zone isn't a set distance or narrow line. How fast and at what angle you approach makes a difference, so the zone varies with the circumstance and situation.

Every herd has animals that are more sensitive to human presence than others. That's why a herd gets lined out after you start a drive with the more sensitive ones at the front. They are putting themselves at the distance they are comfortable with, away from you.

Pressure for an animal to respond will build the farther you get into the zone. When pressured, it is deciding what direction to go, where the herd is, or where its calf is. You might be able to approach an animal to 30 yards and stand still, and it will just drift off after a few minutes. If you approach the zone faster, it may allow you to get to within 15 yards, but it will move away at a faster pace.

If an animal is moving, its flight zone becomes greater.

Weather can also affect the flight zone.

The flight zone will be larger in a corral, because the animals feel confined.

A single animal away from the herd may have a longer flight zone than when it's with the herd, because it feels less secure away from the bunch.

If you stay in the flight zone without allowing a way out for the animal, you create stress. Work livestock by entering and then exiting this flight zone. It usually works that they put themselves out of it by moving away, and you just don't keep coming at them.

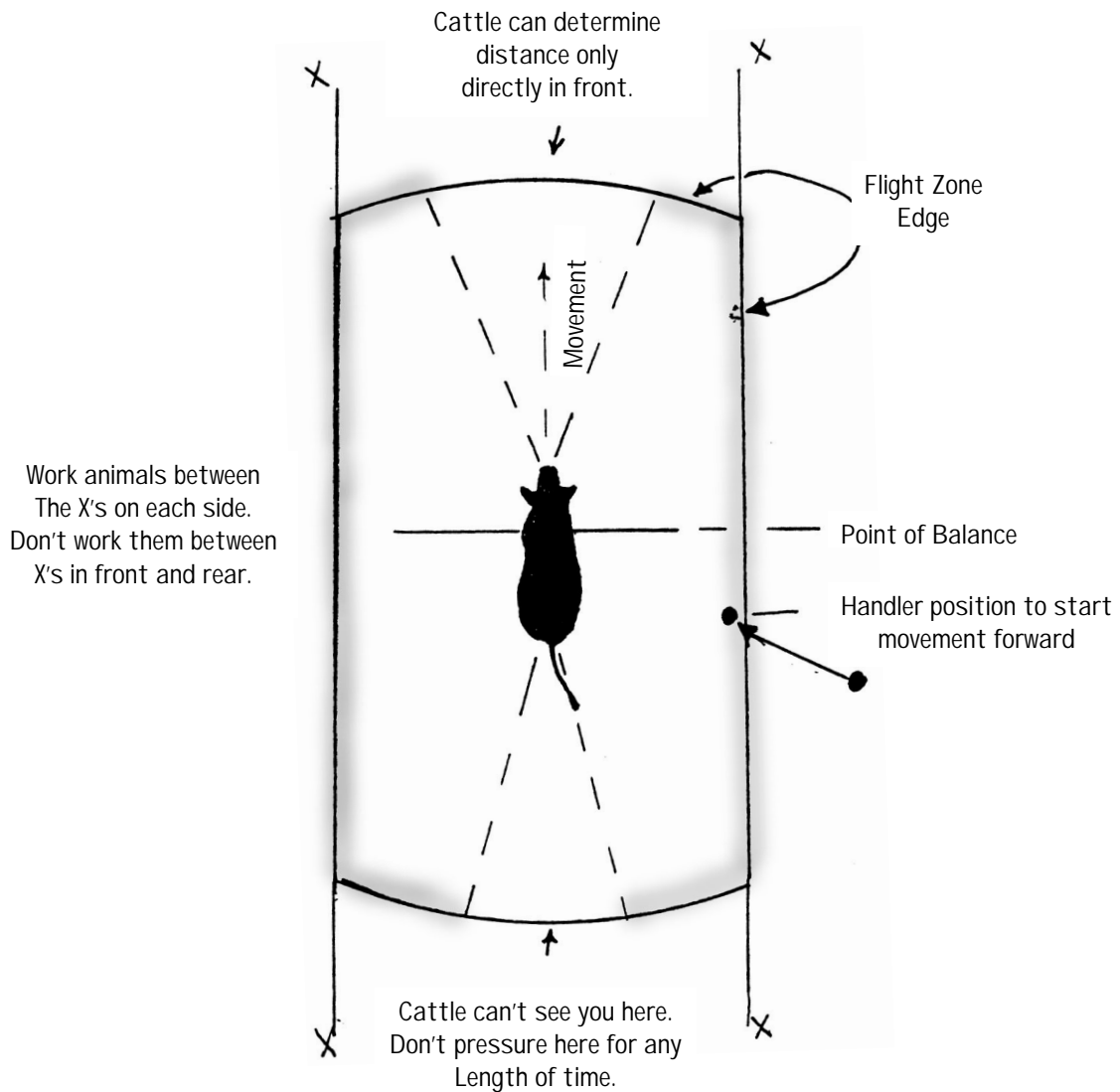
Don't stay in the flight zone if the stock are doing what you want. You are affecting them whenever you are within the zone, and they will do something in response to you being there. Livestock want relief from pressure and will do something to get that relief.

If you're already in the flight zone, such as in a corral, you may need to work them until they understand you will only come so close.

## CATTLE FLIGHT ZONES

The flight zone is not a circle around the animal. It tends to be closer at the sides and farther out in front and back. It might be somewhat larger in the back. It changes with the situation and with time.

DIAGRAM 1



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Watch the animals to determine the distance that you need to work in and out of to get and keep movement going. Adapt to what they are showing you.

Standing animals, especially, will show you signs of when you are close to their zone and when you are well outside it. When you are close, they will usually turn an ear on you. If they turn their heads and look at you with both eyes, you are more likely in it. If you get too far in too quickly, they could take off too fast. This isn't what you want.

Good handlers maintain some sensitivity as to where this zone is and notice when it changes. The more you work just in and out of it, the more refined your control gets and the less motion and time (and horse) you waste.

### **Cattle want a leader**

Cattle want a leader. The leader can be a person if it is someone they trust and don't fear. They will certainly follow a dog or horse. If you aren't in absolute control, however, one of the cows will take over the lead. You must handle them right to obtain absolute control and be the leader.

With the right approach, cattle won't resent you asking them to do things. In fact they will turn over almost total control, because they can have such tremendous faith in a person who handles them well.

Cattle are extremely sensitive and cognizant of everything we do. They don't use logic or reason to figure things out. Many times I've thought, "These dumb heifers can surely see the gate, they can go up this hill, they can cross this river."

Cattle can readily be controlled, but they need us to be with them all the time. If you can accommodate them when they are scared, when they can't see where to go, or when they perceive that

a way is closed, they know you did that. This builds trust. Predators don't do that, and they know it.

Cattle also have to experience that they can do anything you ask and can readily control pressure. They need to know there is eventually a release of pressure. Combine this with having the stock experience many times that they got through many different situations under your direction, and you build confidence and trust.

So, when I say you must first get the stock working well for you before taking them out on the range, this is the idea of it.

### **Cattle want to see what is pressuring**

It's extremely important to remember whenever you are handling cattle, that they want to see what or who is pressuring them. There isn't any situation in handling that I can think of where you shouldn't be cognizant and accommodating of this trait.

Correcting animals that quit the herd is about the only exception to the rule where I deliberately pressure from directly behind and then only slightly enough to get them to turn and look at me or slow down.

Cattle can see you if **you** can see at least one eye. If you can't see an eye, you're too far in behind to be working them to go straight ahead.

Knowing that stock want to see what is pressuring them is an extremely useful thing. For instance, if you want stock to see the gate and go through it, then stand where they can see you and the gate. Pressure them from that area. This will make it easier for them to do it right the first time, and you can control speed and direction from one place.

If you're driving cattle from behind, keep moving back and forth so you stay in their collective sight area. Sometimes you'll do better by mov-

ing a herd from the sides or by leading them in some situations such as crossing a trail bridge or narrow path. You have to use your judgement and see what is best to help the stock do what you want.

Riders who chat and tell lies when the herd is moving well often create the cattle that take side trails. They are bugged because they can't see them.

### **Cattle want to know what we want**

Cattle are very willing to work hard for us. They readily submit to good handling and are easily dominated without resenting it.

Cattle have a rather strong sense of self-preservation so they try to size up your intent when you approach, especially at first.

If they have experienced good handling from you enough, they soon recognize you as the person they trust to work for. Then they can stay calm. But, in these cases, they are still likely to be formulating an idea of what they can do to relieve pressure. Skillful handlers (and horse-men) are very clear about what they want the stock to do.

Cattle are more deliberate thinkers than the average horse. They are less inclined to flight and more inclined to observe for a moment before relying on speed or fighting to get out of the situation. You can help keep them calm if you don't approach them head on. Always walk in straight lines around them. Predators never do that.

Be specific when you're around them and when you ask them to do something. The more specific your request, the better they will respond. Ask them to move out straight with good movement, or to stop moving and stand still. If you don't want something, then get well out of their flight zone. Learn the techniques well.

Stay up close to stock when you want them to move. Most people work from too far away. This makes them wonder what you're doing and can make them anxious. Move in straight lines. Make your movements deliberate, straight, and precise. Release pressure quickly when they respond correctly.

If you are standing in a gate or blocking an alley, for instance, keep some sort of movement going, even if it's minor movement. You can stand in one spot but move your shoulders or hands. This helps them relax, because they don't perceive you as stalking them or getting ready to pounce.

Young cattle (yearlings in particular) are curious, like horses. This can result in a big urge to see you when pressuring them and makes it hard to get them to drive at first. Work them closer to the head. And again, work with quiet persistence. They will get to working for you in good time.

### **Impatience**

Cattle are impatient when pressured, and they will do something soon to find relief. Give them a minute to decide how to respond to your pressure, especially when you're getting them better at handling. They need this patience from you when you're asking more difficult things such as separating one from a herd, crossing deep water, or going up a chute.

Set it up right, persist quietly, wait, and they will do it. Just let them do it on **their** timeframe and don't rush it.

## Handling principles and behavioral traits

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### **Cattle respond to angle of approach**

Your direction or angle of pressure is very important as it affects what the stock will do. Calm cattle will respond predictably if they are working well for you.

For instance, if you pressure into their sides, aiming towards the shoulder or ribs from either side, or approach from a slight angle from the rear, they will go straight ahead.

If you walk straight towards the hip, approaching from behind and off to one side, the hip will turn away.

As a rule, whenever you are working animals from their sides, pressure at a forward angle for all forward movements. Sharper angled approaches are more likely to get prompt forward movement. The more perpendicular the angle of approach you take, especially towards the neck or hip, the tighter the animal will turn.

Other important characteristics about the way stock will move when approached in different directions:

If a calm animal is walking away from you and you walk up along side of it (by the tail first and on towards the head), it will slow down. On a horse, this spot is at the cinch line. On a cow, about the same, but perhaps a little forward. As you continue to go past its shoulder, it will stop. Subsequently if you turn around, reverse direction and go by it again, going from head to tail, it should pick up a walk and go straight ahead. If it was walking when you go down its side, it will speed up.

If you have a bunch of stock in the middle of a field and walk straight lines, back and forth on any side of the herd, they will walk away directly perpendicular to your lines. You will soon be at the back of the herd.

If you are behind a herd that is moving well and walking lines back and forth (either straight lines or zigzagging), as you should, and you extend your line out way to the side and stay there for a little bit, the lead animals will turn. If you go out wide to the right, the lead stock will turn to the left. If you go out wide to the left, the lead will turn right.

Some situations can cause these natural responses to alter. An example is when driving stock up a fence line that is to their right. The fence is pressure to them on the right, so they will tend to drift left and won't be moving exactly perpendicular to your lines. To compensate for the fence pressure on their right, adjust your angle so you are working more off to their left.

Be mindful of what effect your approach angle has on the animal changing directions (see Chapter Eight for more information). Understand that how you approach—either slow and cautious or stepping right in and looking them right in the eye—makes a difference too.

### **Cattle are spot related**

Cattle (to a degree) and horses (to a high degree) associate good or bad experiences with the location of all things around them when it happened. That spot becomes associated with what happened and what to do.

Notice that a horse will buck or shy on one spot in the arena, no matter that the cause of the first buck or scare has been removed. It probably won't buck there, however, if it's headed across that spot going a different direction. To be safe, you could lunge the horse across the spot and have him make calm tracks over it rather than ride over it and risk getting dumped.

If stock were rushed or forced off a riparian area, they will remember being comfortable there before the handler did this. The more sensitive ones will return to it as soon as they can. Right to the same spot. They can be rushed off



this spot a bunch of times, and they will still go back to it a bunch of times if they believe that's the place stress has relief.

If stock were pressured without relief when they were in a herd situation, the more sensitive ones will quit the bunch when they have a chance. Forcing them back in will just make them more sure that the herd is a rotten place and that getting rid of you is profitable.

If they were well handled in a drive and remember going with the herd as being comfortable, they will be easier to drive the next time because they will want to stay together and move together.

Cattle want to be comfortable and have a strong sense of self-preservation. If you let them keep that, they will go with you anywhere. You can readily make everything you want them to do a good experience—being sorted away from the herd, being with the herd, or staying put on the new grazing area.

### **Cattle are single-minded**

Cattle don't reason things out using logic. They aren't capable of thinking things through step by step and then arriving at a conclusion about what to do. They just assimilate experiences.

Every situation, place and setting, and what happened to them there, whether it was good or bad, appears to be cataloged in their minds. They have a keen ability to do this and are probably more sensitive to what is happening around them than we can imagine. Horses are highly developed this way.

Because of the way cattle catalog and act upon experiences, they appear to us to be very single-minded.

Single minded means that after they decide what the situation is, they rely on past experiences to determine what they do. Once decided, they can

be somewhat—to very—stubborn about sticking to that decision. They can be intent on running away, quitting the herd, going back to find a calf, staying put, going to that certain place, up that certain trail—or conversely, on paying attention to what we are asking.

Perhaps no other attribute of cattle causes so many riders to blow a gasket.

When they decide on an avenue we don't want, it simply takes a little knowledge, some patience, good handling, and quiet persistence to change that problem.

Take a calf at the back end of the herd. You (somebody else probably did it) spin a calf around so now its facing away from the herd. It will look up and probably take off running as fast as it can towards the last place it experienced being next to its mother. This can be miles the other way.

Most of us who have experienced this know that if the calf gets too far, it can keep you pretty busy trying to get it headed back the right way to see the herd. Even when you turn it the right direction, it appears blinded for a time and can't see the herd. It has decided on the wrong direction, and it takes some doing for the rider to change its mind.

The cure for this is not to spin it around in the first place, but it happens and serves to show a little about how cattle make decisions.

I was at a guest ranch one day when the owner asked if it would be okay to have some of his guests help move the herd. We had 1,000 yearlings to move, but they had been previously well handled. So I said I thought it might be okay. We had a quick meeting with the guests about staying in line, and I emphasized that no one should go up the sides.

## Handling principles and behavioral traits

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One fellow spoke up and said he found it hard to believe it was so important to stay right in a straight line. After all, the leaders would be so far ahead. I said, "Just believe it." But I knew he didn't.

We had a few wrecks at the start. One guest got his horse stuck. There were a few loose cinches, but as time went on the herd was moving nicely. About an hour into the drive the leaders and the herd veered to the right. I couldn't see what was causing it. I was on the far right side, guiding, and the range was hilly so I couldn't see all the riders.

I went wide to the right to straighten them, but it had no affect.

I moved straight up towards the leaders and went back and forth at an angle. This didn't turn them and only worried them. Then I did it at a trot, but it still had no affect.

Next I pressured the lead animals directly into their necks. They turned but snaked around again to the right.

Now I was about out of tricks. A ranch rider joined me, and we both worked the right side but still had almost no lasting affect. I said, "Just stay out wide," and I took off at a gallop to see what was happening.

I rode past the other riders until I finally got to the last rider on the left side. There he was, the same guy who didn't believe it was important to stay in line. He was 30 yards up the left side, just poking along. I waved him back. The second he was out of there and back in line, the entire herd shifted back to the left and straightened out.

This rider rode up to me later and said he understood a little better what I was talking about. It was a good learning experience. The animals

had decided to turn from him and stuck with that decision. Two or even three riders couldn't change their minds.

### **Good memory**

Cattle have good memories. In a calm frame of mind, they learn fast, often faster than you think possible. When they are rattled and stressed, they can't learn much and rely on past experiences to get them through.

Compared to horses, cattle are deliberate thinkers, less inclined to flight, more inclined to look over a situation first, then go by instincts or past experiences to decide what to do. They are always learning.

You are training livestock whenever you are handling them. Bad experiences stay with them, as do good ones. Handling makes the difference on which it is for them. Pressure correctly, release with perfect timing, and wait a few seconds if you are first working them. Let the right things happen. They remember in what situation they were comfortable or uncomfortable. They will long remember good handling.

### **Cattle are herd animals**

Cattle are most comfortable in a herd and usually prefer not to be alone. They perceive the herd as providing both safety and social benefits. The reason cattle leave the herd, other than temporary situations such as a cow leaving to calve, is because we have stressed them.

One partial exception is when new cattle (brands) are introduced to another herd. They usually don't want to be with this herd at first. Gathering both groups and working them to drive well together will get the new stock incorporated into the herd very quickly.

Good handling helps cattle associate comfort with a herd and allows them to act on their natural desire to stay as a herd. Stressful handling can make them leave it.

### **Movement attracts movement**

Cattle will follow other stock that are moving. In a well-handled herd, movement attracts movement, and they will follow the best movement.

This is an important trait to use to start and keep a herd going. Cattle that just drift or plod along don't entice others to follow. They will follow the one that has an idea of where it's going. They have an almost childlike attitude about following a leader. It doesn't actually have to be the herd leader, just one that walks like it knows where it's going.

That's why we train stock to pick up good movement. It attracts others to go with them, so we don't have to pressure every animal to go or keep going.

### **Cattle prefer to go where they're headed**

Cattle prefer to go in the direction they are already facing or going. Pressure into the sides of animals or walk lines behind them, and they should go straight ahead.

When you first work with cattle and ask for movement, let them pick the direction they move. They will get around to going straight when they get comfortable with you, if you're signaling them right.

Avoid spinning them around or jumping in front of them. This really bothers them and will make them hesitant to go by you. Teach them it's okay to move away straight. This also makes it easy to predict which way they will go when you pressure them. Work on getting them to turn after they are comfortable going straight.

### **Sensitivity changes**

Livestock sensitivity to pressure, handler position and movements changes with circumstances and situations.

Flight zones tend to get wider when stock are up against a fence or when individuals are away from the herd.

Being in familiar settings can make the flight zone smaller.

Weather and recent events can change livestock sensitivity to pressure.

The flight zone lengthens when stock are moving.

Cattle are more sensitive to a new handler at first but get used to a good handler real soon.

Stock can readily detect your mood and attitude, so work them another hour or day if you're in a bad mood or in a hurry. They recognize patterns of behavior, so yours can affect them if it changes.

Stock that have been chased by predators, especially wolves, can be very sensitive. In this case, I make it a point to take the stress off them.

If you leave cattle on a good note the day before, they will be on a rather good note over-all when you show up again. This characteristic is one reason to keep lessons short and positive. Ask the animal to do only what you know it is ready to do.

## Handling principles and behavioral traits

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**Some ways to think about handling problems**  
Cattle's hooves are connected directly to their minds.

We want cattle operating off the more rational and calm part of their brains rather than their instinct for self-preservation, which gets into their emotional side. Good livestock handling means working with the minds of animals. You can't expect their feet to go where you want if you don't have their minds first.

If their hooves go someplace you prefer they didn't, the reason lies within one of three categories:

- Their mental state (calm and clear-thinking, understanding and learning)
- Their emotional state (anger, fright, panic or stress)
- Their physical condition (healthy, unhealthy, tired, hungry, or thirsty)

Whenever I handle new stock, I focus on getting a feel for their mental and emotional state and physical condition. I approach them in the lightest way so as not to overexpose them and then watch to determine which part needs attention first.

Usually, it's the emotional side. They have experienced rough and aggressive handling and need to experience that it's not going to happen anymore.

Sometimes they haven't been handled too roughly but don't respond well because of a lack of understanding about what I am pressuring them to do. Perhaps I'm not moving quite right for the herd in this setting. Maybe they are hot and thirsty or hungry or sick. In these cases, I let them rest or graze or put them in the sick pen and doctor them.

Done correctly, proper handling will change emotional reactions into calm, responsive mental reactions. Then, with practice, stock will respond naturally and responsively to everything you ask them to do.

Calm, well-handled stock rarely get sick. They eat better, calve easier, and gain more weight.

I look for stock to show signs they are actually excited about going someplace different, like to a new pen or pasture. Good emotions like that produce healthier animals.

Some older stock seem to get used to rough handling over time but are still stressed and never turn over real control to you. Look for the subtle signs that will tell you the cattle are emotionally upset.

Take care of our livestock's physical needs. Don't move them too far without rest or short them on water or feed. Good physical care with handling that doesn't stress them is the key to keeping them healthy.

Stock don't want the exertion of spinning around, running off, or fighting the handlers. Given half a reason, they soon stop doing these things. Once they see they can just move comfortably, they see the contrast.

Don't deliberately tire animals so they will be calmer and easier to work. Cattle have been killed from exhaustion, because some riders thought they would see it their way before they collapsed. Stock that are convinced they need to run to avoid pressure will run, and they can run so long that it damages their lungs or heart.

Livestock have a good attention span but give them a break in training if they get too tired. Rewarding good responses with some peace and rest has a big affect on them. I find that breaking up handling sessions over a few days is effective.

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## Handling principles and behavioral traits

When livestock get stressed and panicked, they get sick, injured, or lose weight and behavior worsens.

Animals that get some exercise are better emotionally. They really need daily exercise, whether confined or on a pasture. It helps them relieve any stress they may have. Sometimes we need to go out and get them to do this, even if it simply involves moving them to another corral or pasture and back again. Notice that penned cattle will cough stuff up when moved around. This is a good thing and necessary for maintaining health.

Calves or younger stock that lay down in a pen or pasture when they should be up eating or drinking need to be worked correctly so they will get up and eat as they should.

Whenever you encounter handling problems, look at the stock and decide whether the problems are emotional, mental, or physical. This will help you decide how to solve the problem.

### **Cows are honest**

Cows (and horses) are really honest. There is no deliberate deception on their part, and no acting.

If they are acting stressed, scared, or calm, then they really are. If they are having trouble going through the gate, the gate is trouble. Past experience or the way you're asking is wrong enough to prevent them from doing it. If you're paying attention, they will always tell you.

Try to remember that sensitivity is real on their part and not an attempt to annoy you.

Remember that when you approach new stock, they want to know your intent. With some stock, their question is when to run and where to hide. With well-handled stock, their only question is, "Which way does he want us to walk?"

We should be very clear in what we want stock to do, which will help make them comfortable. Move, turn, speed up, or slow down—make your intent clear and precise. Moving in straight lines helps stock understand your intent.

Livestock have an amazing ability to detect your attitude and intent. They can read your body language. If you go in a pasture or pen feeling stressed or in a hurry, they will detect it and respond to it, regardless of how hard you may try to cover it up. If you're stressed out, don't work stock, especially calves.

Everything you do affects the stock when you are within the flight zone, so if you're watching the cattle, they will mirror your level of understanding.

Never fool your stock into doing something. Don't entrap them in a corral or trick them into the trailer. They will know it if you do. Keep yourself 100 percent honest when handling, like the cattle.

