

# **You Don't Understand Me. I Don't Understand You. Thank You Donald Trump For Helping Me To Understand Why.**

By Alexandra Kurland  
copyright January 2017

## **A Filly's Distress**



I can still hear the filly screaming. She was only three months old, and she was being weaned. Her mother had been abruptly taken away earlier in the day. She was left on her own for the first time in her life, trapped in a dark stall. She was rearing and spinning, screaming for her mother. The older gelding in the stall next to her was aware of her distress and in the quiet way of horses provided her with comfort. She had latched onto him for security. As long as she could hear him next door, she was okay, but now that he had been taken out to be ridden, she was screaming her distress.

The barn owner wasn't having it. He moved the gelding to another part of the barn and put a different horse next to her.

I was watching this drama play out from the other end of the barn where my own horse was stabled. The filly's anguish wrenched at my heart. I wanted to help her, but she wasn't mine to comfort. I couldn't do anything but listen to her scream.

The barn owner didn't share my concern. He explained he was doing this for her own good. She was destined for the race track. She needed to learn how to be on her own. Her life would be a lot better if she learned early on not to attach herself to other horses.

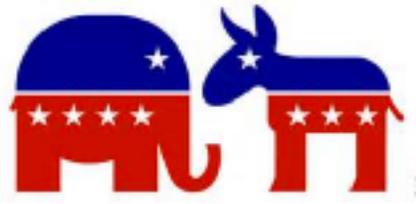
After the third move, and the third loss of her equine comforter, the filly did settle. She stopped forming attachments with the horses that were nearby. She stopped screaming for them whenever they were taken away.

Over the years I've seen the terrible stress some adult horses go through when they are separated from their friends. I think of that filly when I see their anxiety. Through his actions the barn owner may well have been saving her from a lifetime of stress, but every time I think of her I still want to give her the comfort she was so desperately crying out for.

If I told this story to the cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, he would immediately know who I voted for in the 2016 presidential election. - I'm guessing that's not where you thought this story was heading.

## What were we thinking!?

2016 was a puzzling year for all of us. It doesn't matter which side of the political campaign you eventually came down on, throughout the primaries I am sure there were many times when you were puzzled, confused, frustrated and maybe even infuriated by both the Republican and Democratic primary campaigns. And once Clinton and Trump were nominated, things got even worse.

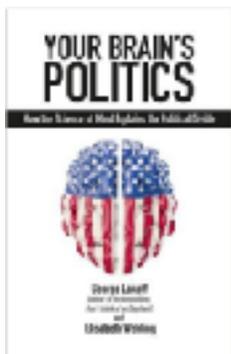


We were all trying to understand one another. How could you support \_\_\_\_\_?

If you were firmly in one camp or the other, even more puzzling was how could anyone still be undecided!?

These last couple of paragraphs were filled with metaphors. Political *campaign*, firmly in *one camp or the other*. These words make it sound as though the year was 1776, not 2016, and we really were fighting a war.

Metaphors are what George Lakoff studies, and it is with his help that I have come to a much better understanding not just of American politics, but also of horse training in general, and clicker training more specifically.



Lakoff is a cognitive linguist. His many books and articles include one called “Your Brain’s Politics”. I highly recommend it. It’s an easy and fascinating read. Whether you were troubled or delighted by the election results, it’s worth getting. If that book catches your interest, you can move on to “Don’t Think of a Elephant”, and then to his many other books and articles.

He does a superb job explaining the puzzle that was the 2016

presidential election campaign. In the process he provides some valuable insights into animal training. In “Your Brain’s Politics” Lakoff presents his work in the form of a conversation between himself and a colleague. The dialog makes it very easy to follow his arguments. In fact, speaking of arguments let’s begin there in the discussion of metaphors.

## Metaphors

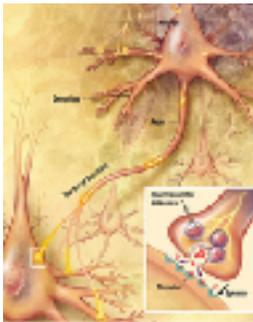
I love metaphors, but I have always thought of them as figures of speech, a way to dress up words so they evoke more vivid images. There I go again: “dress up words” is another metaphor. How can you put a dress on a word? That implies that they are physical objects. If I can dress up an idea, it must be something I can take hold of. That’s what I am implying when I say that I hope you can grasp the ideas I’m going to be discussing.



Metaphors - they’re like flies in a tack room.  
They’re everywhere!



Why? Why is our speech so riddled with metaphors we aren’t even aware of them? Why do our brains so love them? These are the questions Lakoff has been exploring.



The premise that Lakoff and other cognitive scientists are proposing is this: An infant is born with a huge number of random neural connections. Through the toddler years these connections are pruned and modified. Neural connections that are activated regularly through experiences are strengthened. These are the connections that contribute to the formation of that child's primary metaphors.



In “*Your Brain's Politics*” Lakoff uses this example: Your weight goes up and down. It doesn’t go in and out like your waistband. Prices and temperature also go up and down. These all seem like such logical and natural associations we don’t even think about the language we use. Instead you might be thinking: “Of course they go up and down. What else would they do?”

## Why Up Not Out?

Why does this link between quantity and verticality exist? Why is it such a universal connection that we aren't even aware of it?

According to Lakoff, quantity is processed in a region of the brain that handles numbers and masses. Verticality is processed in a very different part of the brain that handles spatial orientation. Through our life experiences, they have become so connected we never question the logic of someone's weight going up or down, or stock prices going up even as housing prices fall.

Here's the process that created the connection between quantity and verticality.

As a small child when you stacked blocks one on top of another, the pile rose as you added more. When your mother poured you a glass of milk, you watched the level rise as your glass was filled.



Think of how many times during the course of just one day you would have experienced the connection between quantity and verticality. Each time you asked for juice (in the age before juice boxes) you would have seen the liquid rising in your cup. Each time you experienced this connection between quantity and verticality you strengthened the neurological connection between these two regions of your brain.

Neurons that fire together wire together. Your experiences were literally creating the structural details of your brain.

## The Myth of the “Free Thinker”



In his book “The Talent Code” Daniel Coyle wrote about the function of myelin in building super fast neural pathways. He looked at the role that repetition plays in building skills. Every time a neural pathway fires, another thin layer of myelin is laid down. Myelin insulates the nerve fibre, adding speed and efficiency to that pathway. Coyle was concentrating mainly on the acquisition of physical skills. How do you become a better tennis player, a better violin player, or for our purposes, a better horse handler?

Lakoff is looking at this from a different perspective. He is asking how does the building of these connections shape our thinking and our actions? He would argue, no one is a free thinker. The structure of your brain determines not just what you think, but also what you cannot think.

As a small child, every time you saw your glass being filled with milk, you were strengthening the neural connection between quantity and verticality. Think of how many times over the course of your life you have seen this happen. You can't help but automatically link quantity with verticality. You are not making a conscious choice about your words when as an adult you refer to stock prices that go up. And look at how universal this kind of metaphor is. Prices, weight,



temperatures, they rise and fall for all of us. We understand this metaphor because we have all watched our parents filling a glass of milk for us.

What do prices, your weight, and temperature, have in common? Quantity is linked with verticality.

Primary metaphors are understood across many cultures because they are built out of experiences which are common to us all.



Lakoff illustrated this by saying an argument is more than the dictionary definition: “an exchange of diverging or opposite views, typically a heated or angry one”. Wrapped up in the word “argument” is the metaphor of a physical struggle. Look at the language we use when we refer to arguments: You can *dominate* an argument. You can be *beaten* in an argument.

Here’s how this one evolved. As a small child, there would have been times when you wanted to run ahead of your mother. Maybe you saw your neighbor walking her dog. You love dogs. You want to run across the street and play with it. Your mother grabs hold of your arm to prevent you from running into the street. You protest. Your argument isn’t just words. It’s a physical struggle. As a small child, how many times would your protests have been linked with physical struggles? If you are a parent of a small child, that may be easy to answer. Think of all the struggles that revolve just around nap time!



Arguing becomes linked with physical struggle. You can’t help but think of arguing in this way, and our language reflects how common this association is. Across many cultures *struggling* over the outcome of an argument is something people understand. Why do so many people want to run away from talking about politics? Because the arguments really do feel like a physical contest.

### Warming up to the Concept



If you still aren’t sure how this works, here’s another great example: the metaphor of affection is warmth. As an infant when you were held in your mother’s arms, you experienced both affection and physical warmth. So now as an adult you speak about relationships that are *heating up* or

*going cold.* Generous people are *warm* hearted. You *warm up* to someone. But you avoid these other people because they are *cold* hearted.

Lakoff's premise is that these connections begin so early in our life experiences we aren't even aware of them. Metaphorical thinking is both unavoidable and largely unconscious.

“In cognitive science, the unconscious mind simply denotes all the parts of our reasoning that we don't notice, don't reflect upon, and cannot control.”

### **Multiple Metaphors**

Are you struggling to grasp these concepts? That brings yet another metaphor into play. *Ideas are objects.* We're *exchanging* ideas. You can *handle* a good idea.

You aren't limited to one metaphoric link. You can also have:

*Ideas Are Locations:* Now you are *jumping from one idea to another*, or you might *arrive* at a good ideas.

*Ideas are food:* You *chew* on ideas. You find some *hard to swallow*. You may need some time *digesting* the ideas I'm presenting. When you're done reading this article, you might want to send me some *feedback*.

I'm sharing these examples from “Your Brain's Politics” to help you understand how universal these metaphors are and how much they are scattered through our language. Once you start noticing them, you really will see that they are as common as flies in a tack room.



## Sources and Targets

Source Domain:  
Refers to physical  
experiences.



Target Domain:  
More abstract  
concepts and  
experiences.

While you are mulling over these ideas, let's add another. Let's consider two very different kinds of experiences. One type, referred to as the source domain, is very physical. The experiences are direct with clear consequences. The other type of experiences, referred to as target domains, are more abstract.

Without our really being aware that this is happening, connections are being created between the physical experiences and the abstract ones. Our understanding of abstract concepts becomes linked to elements from the physical domain. The words we choose are an outward manifestation of these connections.

Source



And Target  
Domains

In cognitive linguistics, metaphoric mapping occurs when elements from the **source** domain, the more physical of the two linked experiences, become mapped onto the more abstract **target**.



Without our being aware that this is happening, connections are being created between the physical experiences and the abstract ones.

*“Whenever we use one given metaphor we restrict our understanding of the target domain to the structures that are provided by the source domain. And at the same time, the structure provided by the source domain profiles certain aspects of the target domain. Thus, metaphors both hide and highlight things that are inherent to the target domain.”*

We have "Classical dressage": Classical is defined as pure, well proportioned, harmonious, balanced, symmetrical, elegant.

*“The metaphors that dominate a discourse will greatly determine how both the speaker and the listener think, and what they do not think, which is anything that the prevalent metaphoric mapping hides due to the nature of its source domain.”* George Lakoff

What is hidden when we use this metaphoric label to describe a style of training?

*“The metaphors we use determine what aspects of any given issue we will focus on—and what aspects our minds will simply ignore.*



*Different source domains are not used simultaneously. Your brain will choose one over the others, and this choice, if you can call it that, is usually entirely unconscious.*

*Metaphoric language evokes metaphoric structures in our minds, and those structures will guide our understanding of a given thing or situation. . . And since different metaphoric source domains will always both highlight and hide different aspects of the thing we reason about, metaphoric language has a huge impact on our perception of reality . . .*



*The more often a metaphoric mapping is used in language, the more that metaphor is being engrained in people's brains due to synaptic strengthening.*



*If a given metaphor is used again and again, then that metaphor becomes our primary way of perceiving the target domain. The mapping simply becomes part of our common sense, our “only,” “unquestionable,” and “inherently rightful” shared understanding of the issue.”*



*Metaphors can create realities in our minds and we don't even notice it. . . And this is not least due to the fact that we are oblivious to the workings of our own reasoning.” George Lakoff - “Your Brain’s Politics”*

## **Moral Metaphors**

There are metaphors we all understand no matter the culture we were raised in. This is because the physical, source domain is independent of culture. So you have:

*The "Morality is strength" metaphor*



As a small child wrestling on the floor with another toddler, you learned that you are better off if you are strong and worse off if you are weak. Now as an adult you refer to your boss as someone who has a *strong* character (or quite possibly just the opposite.)

*The "Morality is up" metaphor.*

As a very young child, you learned that you can reach more places faster when you stop crawling and walk instead. Standing upright becomes associated with being better off. Not only that, parents and other people in authority stand upright. As an adult, community leaders become *upright* citizens and *pillars* of society.

### The "Morality is health" metaphor

You learn that you better off when you are healthy and worse off when you are sick. This gives you a *healthy* work attitude. Or the opposite, bad behavior can be *infectious*.

### The "Morality is purity" metaphor

As a child, getting dirty may have been fun, but it did feel good to be clean again. So now you can have *dirty* thoughts or a *clean* conscious.

And then there is the *Moral Accounting Metaphor*. Again, this metaphor evolves out of your early experiences of well being. Experiences that increase your well-being are "good" or "moral" while experiences that diminish your well-being are "bad" or "immoral."

This is coupled with the *well-being is wealth* metaphor. You are better off when you have the things you want. Put these two together and you get *metaphoric moral accounting*. Inch by inch we are getting back to horse training and that filly who was screaming for her equine friends.

George Lakoff uses these examples in his book to set the stage for one of the most powerful metaphors of all - one that very much dominates our national politics and which, I think, also influences our training choices. But first we need to do some accounting.

## Metaphoric Moral Accounting

Let's see what this means:



When someone does something nice for you, you "*owe*" him a favor. But what happens when someone acts in a way that causes you harm?

That person could "*balance the books*" by doing something good. You *pay back* to the injured party whether that is an individual or a community through service.



That is one way to "*even the score*". Another is you balance the harm done to yourself by doing harm to the wrong doer.



*"If someone takes a piece of your well-being, you have two options. You can have that person restore your well-being by doing something good for you. Or, you can take a piece of their well-being by doing something bad to them."* George Lakoff

Moral accounting is seen in our politics. Conservatives tend to favor crime policies where people *pay* for their crime. The "*books are balanced*" by causing harm to them. Progressives favor policies that support rehabilitation so wrong-doers can *give back* to society.

## Families

Not surprisingly, the approach you tend to favor as an adult grows out of your very early family experiences. As these other examples have shown, your first experiences in life created metaphoric links in your brain. Long before you were ever aware of national governments, you were aware of the authority of your parents. They governed, as in controlled and influenced, your life. They set the rules and taught you right from wrong.



Your family gave you your first experience with hierarchical structures.

The metaphoric map that evolved within your family structure became your template for how society as a whole should be structured. What emerges out of this is the "nation as family" metaphor. We have *founding fathers*, *homeland security*. We send our *sons and daughters* to war. This metaphor crosses many cultures. There is *mother India* but the Germans have a *fatherland*.

The nation as family helps us understand the progressive/conservative divide in US politics. If you think we are straying a long way from horse training, bear with me. The connections will soon become clear.

## **Why Do We Think The Way We Do?**

Lakoff found his way to the nation as family metaphor in the mid 1990's during the Clinton era. He was trying to figure out the puzzle of why certain policy issues go together. The Republicans published the "Contract with America", a document that laid out their positions on a range of domestic and foreign issues. Lakoff could individually understand each of the positions. He could follow the arguments for opposing gun control, reducing taxes, banning abortions, limiting environmental regulation. What he didn't understand was what held these disparate positions together. What was the glue that bound them all together into one political philosophy?

Lakoff asked himself what each of these things had to do one with the other. Why should the right to bear arms be linked with opposition to abortion? He wasn't questioning these positions individually, just what linked them together. Why not have opposition to abortion linked with gun control or environmental protection?

And when he turned it around and looked at the positions that the progressives were taking, he found himself asking the same questions. What linked their policies together?

It was the conservative's campaign for family values that finally gave him the answer. When there were so many critical issues facing the nation, why were politicians spending so much time focusing on family values? And why was this resonating so well with voters? That's when Lakoff began to understand the "nation as family" metaphor. The thesis that emerged is there are two primary models that form the basis for conservative versus progressive policies: the Strict Father and the Nurturant Parent family.

So now we have come to this most central of all metaphors, one that takes us both to our politic beliefs and to horse training.

## Strict Fathers

Conservatives adhere to a Strict Father model, progressives to the Nurturant Parent model.

In the Strict Father model the father is the head of the family.



*"He is the legitimate authority and his authority is not to be challenged. The family needs such a moral authority because the world is a dangerous place. . . There is good and bad in the world.*

*The father, as the legitimate authority of the family, knows right from wrong, and he is naturally good and morally upright. He defends the family against evil, and he teaches his children to develop moral strength. The mother cannot do the job of the father, because women are seen as less strong. The duty of the mother is to support her husband in his authority. This model has gender-based parental roles.*

*Moreover, the world is assumed to be innately competitive. It is the father's responsibility to compete successfully in the world so he can take care of his family. He must also teach his children how to compete with others so that they can become successful and self-reliant when they grow up. So the world is both dangerous and competitive.*

*There are absolute rights and wrongs: people's behaviors, actions, and beliefs are either right—or they are wrong. The father, as the legitimate authority in the family, knows right from wrong. He teaches the children right from wrong and he communicates this to the children in a hierarchical way. He sets strict rules and requests absolute obedience.*

*Obedience to the father is seen as moral behavior in children. It is upheld through a system of reward and punishment. Bad behavior in children is always punished and good behavior is rewarded.*

*Punishment is seen as absolutely crucial. It is the parents' moral duty to punish bad behavior in children, because they assume this is the only way they will develop discipline*

*and strength. And since children are born “bad,” they will learn how to be good only through punishment.*

*Being born “bad” means children are born undisciplined. They want to do whatever feels good to them. They tend to want to indulge themselves. So they need to learn right from wrong. Self-indulgence is categorically wrong. Self-discipline is inherently right. Children don’t know this when they are born, and parents must teach them by rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior. Punishment is the more important concept. It is through punishment that children learn strength and self-discipline.*

*Punishment is viewed not as a lack of love but as a sign of love—“tough love.” It is seen as the parents’ moral duty to punish their children. Parents who don’t punish their children, who fail to teach them that wrong behaviors result in painful “consequences,” are regarded as immoral and irresponsible.*

*Punishment helps children become self-disciplined and morally strong. If you are punished often enough by a moral authority, you will learn to discipline yourself, to be your own moral authority!*

*Conservatives in the United States are working under the assumption that everyone can be successful. No matter what your background might be, if you build up enough moral strength and self-discipline, then you can make it. Anyone who is self-disciplined can be successful. And people’s social and economic success, in turn, is proof of their moral strength. And there’s a converse argument hidden in this equation, something that is automatically implied: people who are not successful are lacking in moral strength and self-discipline. They are morally weak. And people who are morally weak are bad people who deserve their poverty.”*

Excerpt From: George Lakoff. “Your Brain's Politics.”

## If the shoe fits, wear it . . .



This sounds eerily like traditional force-based horse training. Substitute a few words and you have this:

*“The **trainer** is the legitimate authority and his authority is not to be challenged. . . Obedience to the **trainer** is seen as correct behavior in the **horse**. It is upheld through a system of reward and punishment. Bad behavior from the **horse** is always punished and good behavior is rewarded.*

*Punishment is seen as absolutely crucial. It is the **trainer's** moral duty to punish bad behavior in his **horse**, because this is the only way to develop discipline and strength. And since **horses** are born “bad,” they will learn how to be good only through punishment.”*



That’s just a sampling. I’ll leave it to you to do the rest. What Lakoff is describing here is the justification we hear all too often why punishment is necessary. It’s okay to reward the horse when he has done well, but if he disobeys the rider, he must be punished. There are many people who are exploring clicker training who hold with this world view. They use a clicker and treats to teach new skills, but they also use corrections to enforce behavior.

This has gotten people into some terrible internet skirmishes as they argue about whether or not someone is really a clicker trainer. The clicker “purists” would say anyone who uses negative reinforcement can’t be a real clicker trainer because they are using aversive training techniques.

What Lakoff offers us is another way of looking at this schism. Instead of arguing about the *processes* people are employing, he shows us that we should be delving deeper to look at core value systems.

## Nurturing Parents

I've defined Lakoff's Strict father model. Now let me give you his Nurturant Parent model. Here it's:



*"moral to show empathy, to nurture, and to take on individual as well as social responsibility. In the Nurturant Parent family, parents strive to raise their children to become nurturers through guiding by example, through being nurturant towards them. One way of doing that is to empower one's children to follow their dreams, whatever those might be.*

*Cooperation with others is seen as more important than competition. Parents teach their children to empathize with others, and to be able to see the world through other people's eyes.*

*Instead of hierarchical communication, the Nurturant Parent model focuses on open communication at eye level. Children are encouraged to speak their minds and develop their own ideas, and there is mutual respect between children and parents. This is different from other parenting models, in which children are expected to show respect for their parents, but not vice versa.*

*Parents are still the family authority, and they are the ones who ultimately make the decisions. But decisions are discussed with children. . . .*

*Success is not understood as "success over others" or "winning against others," but as fulfilling one's own potential. For instance, personal success can mean to have helped someone else, or to have taken on responsibility for a group of people with no prospect of any kind of material reward." George Lakoff - "Your Brain's Politics"*

## **Animal Training or Child Rearing - The Metaphors are the Same**

Certainly whether it's with horses, dogs, or small children, we all know people who fit the strict father metaphor to a "T" in their thinking. And we also know people who handle their horses and raise their children using the nurturing parent model.

Something that clearly emerges out of the Strict Father model are horse shows. If competition, proving your strength and moral superiority, is central to this model, then of course people would turn every aspect of working with horses into a competition. Farriers will compete to see who can forge the best shoe. Groomers will compete to see who can turn out the fanciest braids. And riders - riders will compete in any sport they can devise.



Why do some people compete, while others show no interest?

Those who follow the nurturant parent model are less interested in competition. If they go to a show, it's to help out their friends. They like the lead line classes where everybody gets a ribbon. They might show their own horse, but only for the experience.



The nurturing-parent riders are often horrified by the win-at-any-cost tactics that they see at shows. When they start clicker training, they say they want to compete to show everyone that you can succeed without all that. But then they start clicker training and the need to compete drops away. They are more and more viewing the world from the nurturing parent mindset that supports cooperation.

When in Rome . . . Competitions are designed by “strict father” riders. When you show, you are playing by those rules. Why do some people actively participate while others are appalled by what they regard as “win-at-any-cost tactics?”

What we learn from this is if we want to show off our superstar clicker-trained horses, we need to do so in a format that promotes cooperation not competition.

If you decide that you really do want to compete, you will want to create a frame for yourself that allows you to show off your clicker superstar without being drawn back into the Strict Father model. If you bring in one element, can you keep out all the rest? Can you compete without falling back into the role of enforcer?



## Same Word - Different Meaning

This brings us to a much-used word in horse training - respect.



Same word - two metaphors, two definitions.

In the strict father model of parenting respect is maintained through the use of punishment. Respect means the children follow strict rules and there are painful consequences for breaking the rules. This is not done to be cruel, but to insure that the individual grows strong and thrives in a competitive world.

In contrast children raised in the "nurturing parent model" experience a different kind of respect. Respect follows the dictionary definition: "a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements." Children want to do well to please their parents. The respect they have for their parents grows out of loving interactions where they see their parents actively watching out for their well-being.

## Parenting Styles

If you adhere to the strict father model of parenting, you might think of the nurturing parent model as laissez-faire parenting. *"The children grow up ungoverned, and undisciplined. They are allowed to do whatever they please."*

Clicker training will strike you as cut from the same, overly permissive cloth. At best it is about bribing animals to do what is right. At worst you're just an overly indulgent pet owner letting your animals get away with anything they want.

For both children and animals neither is the case for the nurturing parent model, but for someone following the strict father model it is hard to understand the difference between indulgent, laissez-faire, and nurturing parenting. Given the absence of strict control where bad behavior is punished, in their mind these other models of parenting all become lumped together into one basket.



For the Strict Father indulgent, laissez-faire, and nurturing parenting all become lumped together into one basket.

This is one of the reasons many people get so stuck on feeding treats. If you have lumped these three parenting styles all into one basket, of course you won't be able to separate out the use of treats as reinforcers. You'll see the use of treats as nothing more than bribes. No amount of discussion about treats being reinforcers and clicker training being science-based will help. The Strict Father Metaphor makes it hard for them to see the treats as anything but a sign of immoral weakness. It is no wonder they feel so obliged to oppose the use of treats in training.

If you've considered clicker training, but gotten stuck over the use of treats, let's put each of these parenting styles in it's own basket and see where that takes us.



## Your Eggs In The Wrong Baskets

Indulgent parenting means children are given anything they want whenever they want it without requiring anything in return.



Laissez-faire parenting means children can do whatever they want without any boundaries being set.

The Strict Parent's view of treats is based on laissez-faire and indulgent parenting models.

In these two models children are not required to take responsibility for themselves or for others. No amount of discussion about treats being reinforcers and clicker training being science-based will help. In the Strict Father Metaphor treats are not just a sign of weakness, they are immoral.

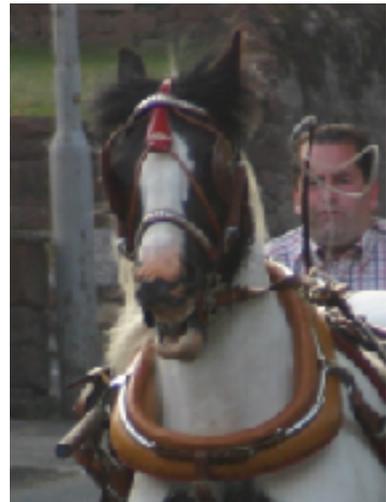


## Putting Your Eggs In A Different Basket



That's not the case in the nurturing parent model. Moral responsibility is taught, but it is not built around absolutes of right and wrong as it is in the Strict Father model. Rather children are taught that it is right to be concerned about and care for the individual needs of others. It is wrong to harm others, or to stand by and let someone else be harmed. So responsibility is measured by how people interact with one another.

When individuals raised in the nurturing parent model see a child or a horse being hit, they will want to step in and intervene.



When an individual is in distress, someone raised in the nurturing parent model will want to step in and intervene.



*“Moral behavior in the nurturant worldview requires empathy toward people and their situations.*

*In the Nurturant Parent family, children are brought up to understand others and empathize with them, not to be obedient to an authority that dictates right and wrong.*

*In order to understand others, you first need to tolerate them. You have to be willing and able to consider their perspective on things. Rather than judging people, you must strive to comprehend them. Those are two very different modes of operating.*

*If your ultimate goal is to comprehend others, to see their perspective on things, then you cannot maintain a system that divides the world into right and wrong based on values*



*that are highly specific to your own moral system. That would, in fact, be quite problematic, and it would make you prone to push your values onto others.” George Lakoff - Your Brain’s Politics*



*“In the Strict Father family, the father is an absolute moral authority that is not to be challenged—neither from within the family nor from outside the family. And since the father is the legitimate authority in the family, the values he holds are by definition “good” and “right.” ”*

*People who live by values that differ from his threaten what he sees as the legitimate authority of the father. He is the one who knows right from wrong. Someone holding these other views cannot be tolerated.*

*It becomes the moral duty of the father to not just uphold his values within the family, but to also defend them against other value systems.” George Lakoff*

I find this to be a stunning statement. It explains so much. On a public policy basis I have wondered for years why people are so passionately and publicly opposed to things that will not have any impact one way or the other on their own lives. Lakoff uses the example of someone living in the mid-west who opposes legislation that would let a gay couple living in California marry. Why should it matter to this mid-western father what two people living in California do?

The answer lies in understanding the strict father model.

*“Tolerating values that oppose Strict Father morality is seen as moral weakness, as lacking a moral backbone. In contrast, a progressive doesn’t think of tolerance as a sign of weakness. In the Nurturant Parent model, tolerance is a sign of strength—it is based on empathy, and it allows for people to cooperate with and watch out for each other. And not only that, tolerance is also necessary in order to take on responsibility for others. Taking on social responsibility means to strive to elevate everyone’s well-being.*

*So in this model, instead of having rigid notions of what constitutes the “right” and “wrong” ways of being, people must be allowed to be who they are, as individuals. This means that you welcome different religions, different sexual and gender identities, different cultural norms, and so on because they are not perceived as a threat to the progressive value system. In fact, not tolerating those who are different from us would constitute a threat to the progressive value system, because that would violate its core values—empathy, nurturance, and social responsibility.” George Lakoff - “Your Brain’s Politics”*

## **The Connection to Animal Training**



Begin clicker training at your boarding barn and what happens?

People who were raised in the strict father model will see your training as immoral. They can’t leave you alone because they view your actions as a threat to their authority. So whether

So here we have a way of understanding an all too familiar experience. You are boarding your horse in a public barn, and you have decided to clicker train your horse. What happens? The sharks attack. Why should it matter to anyone else what you are doing with your horse? If it isn’t interfering, with them, why should they care what you do?



The sharks attack.

they are in your barn, or on the internet, they will feel that it is their moral duty to punish your training choice. We see this all the time on facebook and in forums. Post an enthusiastic report about your first attempt at clicker training, and what happens? You'll draw in all the sharks in the neighborhood.

This has long been a puzzle. Why should these people care what you do with your horse, especially when they only know you through cyberspace?

When I first started posting articles about clicker training, there was a trainer in Australia named Craig who clearly felt it was his moral duty to stamp out clicker training before it had a chance to spread. For him clicker training was a brush fire that had to be put out at any cost. He was right in a way. Clicker training has spread around the planet, but it has not been like a fire destroying everything in its path. Rather it is the sunshine bringing warmth after a cloudy day.

When I write about clicker training, I am thinking about this more inclusive metaphor: In the 1980s I could buy apples for my horses at the local grocery store. There's no surprise there. I had a choice of McIntosh apples - which I



don't like, red and golden delicious, and Granny Smiths. That was pretty much it. The choices were as limited as were the choices in horse training.

By 1993 when I first started experimenting with clicker training, I could buy cortlands and macouns. Much better. They were soon joined by galas and empires. Today you can add pink

ladies, braeburns, honey crisp, Paula reds and many more to the list. These new apples can all be found in the produce aisle, right along side the McIntosh apples. These new varieties didn't push the older apples off the shelf. You can still buy them, but today I can also find apple varieties that I really like. I'm not limited to a narrow set of choices. I don't need to feel threatened because there are McIntosh apples



right next to the bags of empires. We can all have what we want.

If I followed the Strict Parent metaphor of training, I might be able to stop myself from complaining to the produce manager that he's wasting space putting all those other apples out. Apples aren't that important. But I might feel compelled to attack anyone who trained in a different style from me. I would be morally outraged, and I would need to spend my time trying to stamp out these interlopers.

Instead I follow a different metaphor. I can feed apples to my horses and enjoy all the choices that are now available to me, both in the produce section of the grocery store and the training aisle of the bookstore.



## Metaphors Matter

If I am new to clicker training and I'm fumbling my way through the first few lessons, it may not just be the strict parents who come after me. I may also find I'm under siege from the nurturing parents.

They have definite limits to their tolerance, but they aren't centered around absolutes of right and wrong.

*"Progressive tolerance ends where harm to others begins. Protecting others against harm is an important component of the Nurturant Parent model." George Lakoff*

The strict parents will oppose your use of food on moral grounds.



The nurturing parent will be convinced it isn't safe. They'll oppose your use of clicker training because they think your horse will bite you trying to get his treats. They aren't morally appalled by your choice. They are just trying to protect you from what they see as a potential risk.

(In politics this also helps to explain the conservatives opposition to gun control and the progressives support for it. But for the full explanation I'll send you to Lakoff's book *"Your Brain's Politics"*. It's a fascinating discussion no matter which side of the divide you are on.)

Metaphors matter. Both in your barn and on the internet the sharks are everywhere. They are well meaning, and from their perspective they are right. Understanding their metaphors helps us reframe the dialog around our choice to clicker train.

## My Horse Just Bit Me!

Here's another interesting parallel between Lakoff's analysis of our political choices and horse training:



*“According to Strict Father morality, being a criminal is equated with being a bad, immoral person. One task of the justice system is to make sure that this badness—this immorality—doesn’t spread throughout society. This reasoning is based on the “Morality As Health” metaphor. How does one best protect society against immoral contamination? By locking away people who are immoral.*”

*This reasoning is based on the notion of “direct causation,” which is a cornerstone of the Strict Father model: people who break the law do so because they are inherently immoral, bad people.” George Lakoff*

Direct causation holds for animal training, as well. A horse or dog that bites is bad. It's not the behavior alone which is bad. It is the individual, and that individual must be punished.

Here's the contrast:

*“The Nurturant Parent model infers a different way of reasoning about crime. This model considers the notion of “systemic causation.” It assumes that crime is the outcome of a number of distinct but interrelated societal causes. . . Therefore, the most efficient way to fight crime is to fight its root causes via preventative social policies that counter problems such as poverty, racism, lack of education and health care, and so on. Simply put, progressives believe that the best anti-crime policies are those that help to prevent crime before it happens, policies that grant people chances in life and protect them from despair and social aggression.*”

*In Nurturant Parent reasoning, protecting society against crime means to counteract its roots, not to prosecute and lock up criminals after the fact.”*

This sounds a lot like clicker training.

### **What we Call Ourselves**

Lakoff equates the strict father model with the conservative movement in the United States; progressives with the nurturant parent model.

If we borrow this language, then we can refer to horse training which relies on punishment to create strict obedience as conservative training. Here horses are all treated much the same. They must yield to the trainer’s way of doing things, or they are punished. If a horse disobeys, it is a bad horse. It is never the trainer who is at fault.

Training that considers the individual needs of the animals is progressive. I would put good clicker training under the progressive wing of animal training.

How does someone who adheres to this wing of animal training respond to a horse that bites? He looks at the underlying causes. He solves the problem by going back many steps in the training, and by by addressing environmental triggers.

## More Connections To Horse Training

### Common Wealth

*“The Nurturant Parent model has a number of moral principles that stipulate what a moral society must provide. There are acceptable standards as to how individuals must be treated at the very least. For instance, people may not be allowed to die of hunger, people may not be left to live on the streets, and people should not be left without basic medical care. Every citizen in a society should be granted a minimum standard of human dignity.*

*The Nurturant Parent model entails that citizens assume responsibility for each other and care for each other, and promotes that the government should enable citizens to do this.*



*This is . . . the Commonwealth Principle: use the common wealth for the common good. You collectively raise money via taxes and then use those funds to build and maintain an infrastructure that benefits everyone.*

*Every person who makes a living in the United States is using the common wealth. Everyone who runs a business, and anyone who makes tons of money running a business, not only built that business using the public infrastructures but also maintains that business by using the commonly financed infrastructure.*

*The more money you make, the more you use those infrastructures. And so if you use the infrastructure more than others because you run a big business, well, then you should also contribute a fair share in taxes to maintain that infrastructure.*



*Many people don't see that they heavily rely on our shared wealth. The reason lies in the nature of the Strict Father model. If you believe that the world is a competitive place, and that you stand in perpetual competition with those around you, then you see yourself as working against others. The ideal strict father figure not only makes it in this world, but does so*

*on his or her own. Core values in this model are self-reliance and self-interest, not shared interests and social responsibility.*

*The ideal strict father has no appreciation of the fact that society has helped him from the very beginning, and that all his endeavors and successes are based on things that the community has built and continuously maintains for everyone.” George Lakoff - “Your Brain’s Politics”*

## **The Connection to Horse Training**

### **Shared Knowledge**

How is this relevant? Progressive horse trainers and teachers understand that their successes are part of a common wealth of knowledge. They are not in competition with one another, but rather seek to maximize the common good by sharing their own discoveries and innovations. They want everyone to succeed. And they recognize that their work is built upon the discoveries of people who have come before them. They acknowledge their sources and whenever possible seek to give back to the community that has helped them succeed.

When I first started clicker training, several trainers who were active at that time trademarked names for themselves. There was Gary Wilkes with “Click and Treat”, and Jim Logan with “Click and Reward”. I began to think - how will we

ever be able to talk about this training if all these phrases are trademarked? From a business standpoint I could understand it, but it was beginning to feel so restrictive. Karen Pryor was different. Karen is the one who coined the term “clicker training”, but she didn’t trademark it. Instead she gave it to the world, and look what has happened. Our common wealth of training has grown and spread around the planet.

Here’s the contrast: if you are a conservative horse trainer, you live in a competitive world. You must hold your secrets close to your chest so that others can’t benefit from them. You are competing against them. And furthermore, you got where you are on your own. You are self made. You owe nothing to anyone else. The ideas you do share are your own invention.

Think about this as you consider working with a particular trainer. How generously do they credit their sources? How openly do they tell you about the origins of their training methods? This will tell you much more about their core values than any name they may have attached to their training.



It doesn’t matter if they are a progressive or a conservative, people put all kinds of inviting and sometimes very misleading labels on their training.

Understanding the strict father versus the nurturing parent model will help you sort out what you are really dealing with.

## More Connections to Horse Training

### Where Are All The Men



At clicker clinics people often remark that there are so many more women than men in attendance. Who knows what the reasons for this are. There are more women than men in general in the horse world, so maybe this is just a reflection of that more global statistic.

Or perhaps clicker training fits more comfortably in the nurturing parent model which would seem to slant it more towards women. But make no mistake. *“Women can assume the role of the strict father in their families, and they can be metaphoric Strict Fathers in politics. There are also families in which spouses*

*hold different world views. The father may endorse a Nurturant Parent worldview, while his wife believes in the Strict Father model.”* George Lakoff

So there are certainly women who are totally comfortable using punishment to bring a horse “into line”.

And there are lots of men who clicker train.

### Agree to Disagree

*“The Nation As Family metaphor and its two moral contestations, Strict Father and Nurturant Parent morality, structure the ways in which we think about moral parenting and moral governance in terms of two clearly distinguishable, idealized models. . . You do not have to grow up in a family that is an ideal version of either model in order to understand them.*

*If the idealized model you endorse the most is Strict Father morality, then you’re likely politically more conservative. If you endorse a Nurturant Parent model, you’re likely more progressive.”*

**The two parenting metaphors create very different and opposing world views.**



The Strict Father Frame is structured around social dominance.



The Nurturant Parent Frame is based on social empathy.

Each is equally “true” to those who endorse them, even if they conflict with each other and lead to contrasting parenting/training choices.

Policies that may be “morally wrong” in the eyes of a progressive can be highly moral in the eyes of a conservative. In the eyes of a conservative, policies that are in line with Strict Father ideals are highly moral. A progressive may say, “What you do in politics is simply wrong,” and a conservative will answer right back, “Not at all, in fact, what you suggest we do horrifies me.”

## The Connection to Horse Training

### “I’m Right! You’re Wrong.”

Sound familiar. Isn’t this the argument that goes on all the time in boarding barns? “What you are doing with your horse is wrong!” We’ve probably all been on the receiving end of that statement! And at some point we’ve probably also thought exactly that about someone else’s training.

The progressives are thinking: “That rider using spurs is cruel!”



While the conservatives are watching with fingernails-on-the-blackboard disgust as a rider keeps feeding treats to her horse.

Lakoff again: *“This is unfortunately the reality of policymaking and political debate. People assume that there is only one type of “right” and “wrong.” They are not aware that there are two moral world views at the core of US politics, and that these two belief systems are equally “true” to those who endorse them, even if they conflict with each other and lead to contrasting policy proposals.”*

It’s so easy to fall into the trap (another metaphor) of thinking in terms of them versus us.

“I” (said virtuously) “do things *THIS WAY*, while those others” (said with disdain), “do it that way. My way is obviously the Only Right Way to think and act. Their’s is faulty.”

I don’t mean this to be just another them versus us diatribe. Watching the presidential campaign unfold in 2016, I have both understood and been puzzled by the “other” side. It doesn’t matter which side you ultimately were on - (There’s another metaphor. You see they truly are everywhere! And even saying they are everywhere is a metaphor that implies ideas can have locations.)

To continue - whichever side you were on, I'm sure you were at times puzzled and horrified by the views held by supporters of the opposing candidate. How could someone possibly support \_\_\_\_\_!

And even more puzzling to both progressives and conservatives were the undecideds. The two candidates were so completely different. "How could you possibly be undecided?" I heard that from both sides in the days leading up to the election.

### **Both Sides of the Fence**

How could you be undecided? Understanding this puzzle has helped me see with much greater clarity the process people go through as they begin to explore clicker training. So thank you Donald Trump, but even more thank you George Lakoff for giving me a fresh perspective with which to view things. You'll see what I mean as we let Lakoff unravel another piece of the metaphor mystery.

He would say that "the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models are centered around the notions of social dominance and social empathy, respectively."



Dominance most of us understand. The concept has been brought into both dog and horse training to justify the use of punishment in maintaining our position in a hierarchy. Wrestling puppies and wrestling toddlers all learn that some individuals are stronger than others and can take what they want. In a training relationship proponents of the dominance metaphor would say that you want to be the one on top of the heap.

Empathy is not so well understood. We know that it means the ability to understand and share someone else's feeling. It is the "share" part of the definition that is so important. I can understand that someone is sad without feeling sad myself. It's when tears start to well up in the corner of my eyes that I am truly experiencing empathy. There is a physical connection to the other person's sadness that makes this such an important concept to understand.

So lets look a little further at empathy. Humans have what are called mirror neurons. It appears that these neurons fire whenever we carry out an action.

They also fire when we watch someone else carry out that same action.



Our understanding of the brain is still very much in it's infancy. Our knowledge is steadily expanding and changing. So I treat this explanation of mirror neurons not as solid, unchangeable fact, but more as another metaphor which helps me make sense of the world.

Here is the Mirror Neuron metaphor as explained by George Lakoff:

There are connections in the brain between the region where mirror neurons are and the region that manages emotions.

*"There is a "Physiology of Emotions" that is shared by people all over the world. Every emotion goes hand in hand with specific facial muscle movements.*

*When a person is happy, angry, or scared, their emotion comes with an associated set of specific facial movements, such as "smiling" or "frowning."*



*Our brain notices even the tiniest muscle movements in our interlocutors' faces and, via mirror neurons, simulates what it means when we carry out those same movements. So when we observe that a friend of ours is looking sad, our brain activates the same neurons it would be firing if we were looking sad.*

*It's not our conscious decision whether or not to have empathy with others. Mirror neurons are activated in our brains automatically. We have no control over this.*

*The stronger the synaptic connection between mirror neurons and the emotional center in the brain, the more empathy a person experiences. This hypothesis explains how people can "learn" to be more empathic, namely, through being nurtured and treated with empathy by others. . . .*



*Empathy is a natural function of our body, and is rooted in the physiology of our brain.*



*Social dominance also has a physical origin. Childhood experiences that show us that some people are physically stronger than others and, as a result, they can impose their will on others.*

*Both concepts are rooted in physical experience." George Lakoff*

How these concepts shape your life depends upon your experiences with strict and nurturant family interactions.

Unless you were very isolated, whichever type of family you grew up in - strict or nurturing - you would still have been exposed to the other type of parenting via your friends, teachers, books, movies and television. You would be familiar with both models.

So in theory you should be able to make political decisions based on either of them. But *"the model we practice the most in our everyday lives . . . will usually be the one we apply to politics."*

We can understand the other model, but it is *"less likely to influence our decision-making with regard to political issues."*

### **Not so black and White**

Strict Father versus nurturing parent: if we all fit into such tidy black and white categories, our politics and our training choices would be much easier to understand, but we don't. We all know of many instances where an individual is very conservative in their views in one area, but very progressive in another. That probably describes each of one of us reading these words. Most of us are biconceptuals.

*"These "biconceptuals" may resort to either moral system when reasoning about politics. They are—at least somewhat—open to applying either worldview to politics. And which value system they ultimately use depends largely on the language that governs public discourse.*

*Many pollsters and campaign managers have a flawed assumption about how people make decisions. This assumption is that people vote for candidates based on the details of those candidates' positions on political issues."*

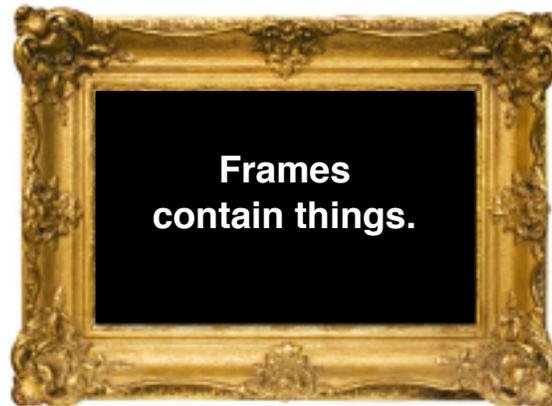
Read this again. What Lakoff is saying is facts don't matter. What convinces someone to vote for you are not the "issues". It is how you frame your language around values.

### **The Connection to Horse Training**

#### **Sharing Clicker Training**

If we want to encourage people to use clicker training, we need to pay attention to what Lakoff is saying. You can tell someone that clicker training is science based. You can say it is effective, efficient, humane training. None of that matters. You have only to listen to one of the presidential debates to see how little facts matter. Look at all the facts (real and made up) that are thrown at us. The only ones that stick are the ones that match our values.

## Frames



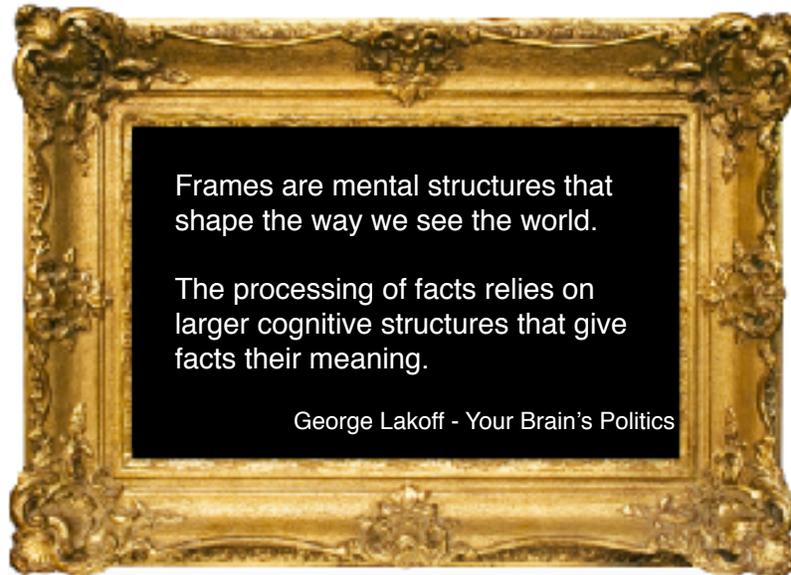
In horse training we talk about putting horses in frames, framing horses up. It means the horse's topline maintains a steady outline. He is framed between the rider's seat and hands.



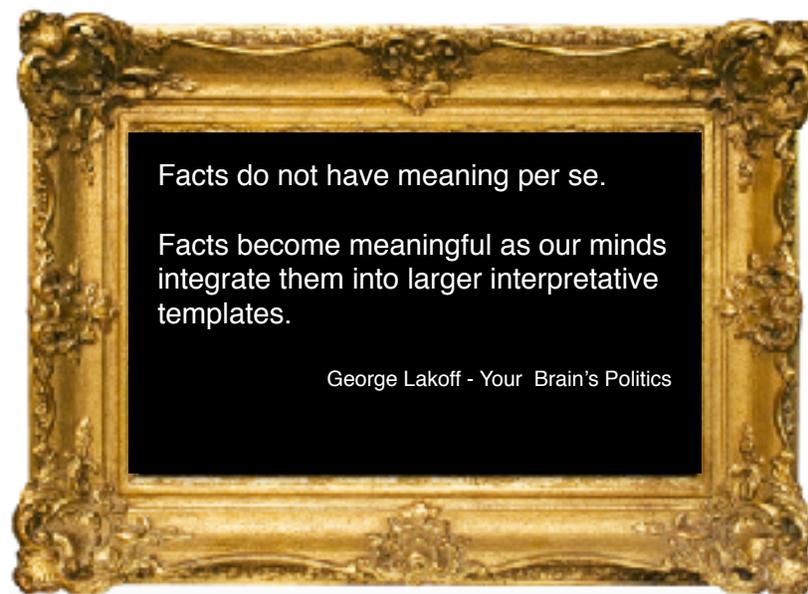
Riders argue back and forth on the value of frames. A conservative trainer might favor a strict adherence to a frame. The progressives would see movement as a much more dynamic process.

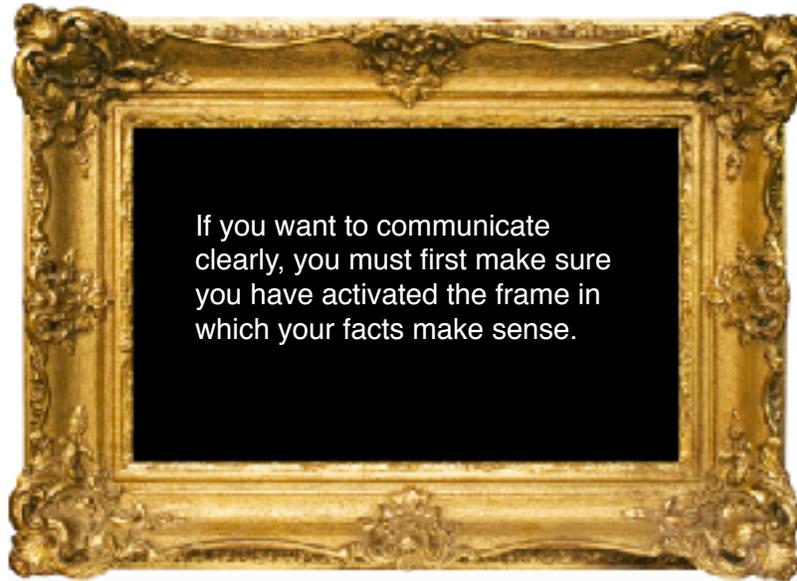
Lakoff discusses a different kind of frame, but one that is even more relevant to horse training.

Here is his definition: *“Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. The processing of facts relies on these larger cognitive structures to give facts their meaning.”*



Such cognitive structures are called “frames”. Facts cannot be processed outside of frames.



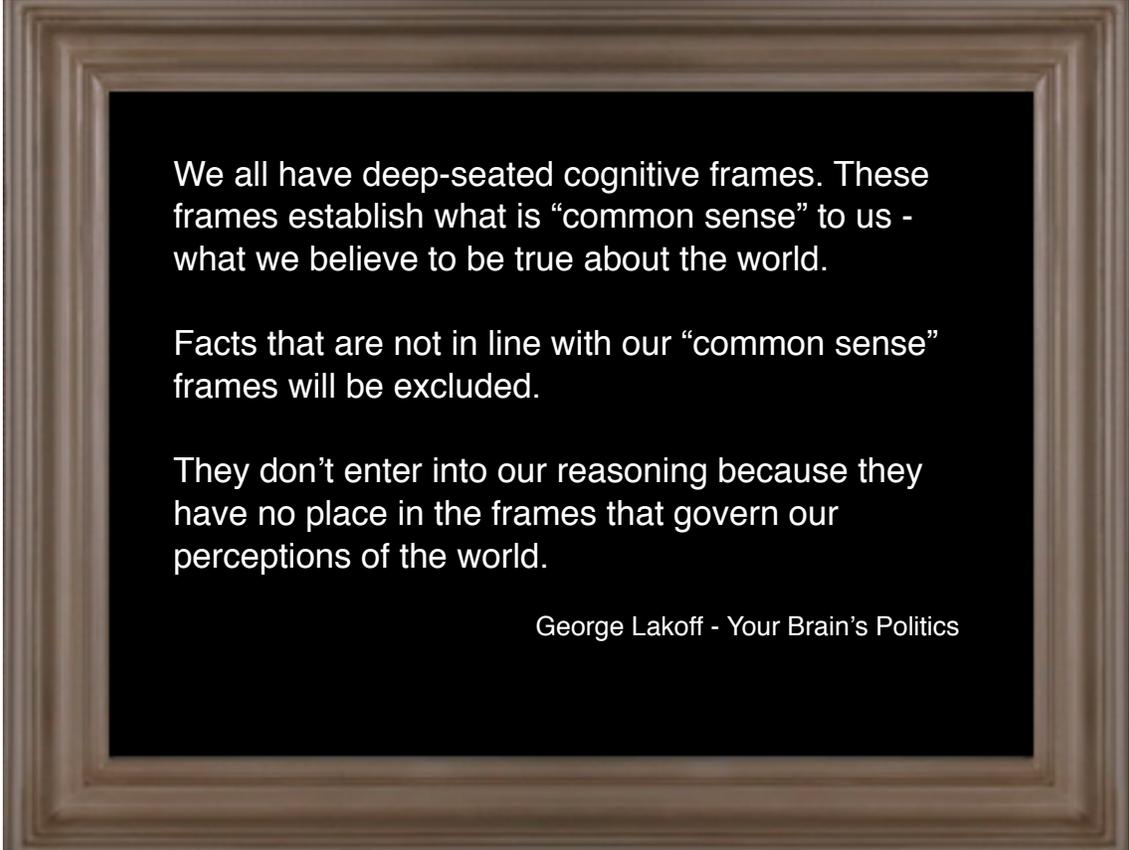


*“If you want to communicate the pressing relevance of certain political facts, then the first thing you want to do is make sure that you’re using frames in which those facts actually make sense.*

*Moreover, you want to make sure that you don’t evoke in people’s minds the frames being used by your opponent, because most likely those frames are not consistent with the facts you regard as important.*

*And so you must choose your frames carefully, because once a frame is activated in someone’s mind, facts that don’t fit into this frame will be ignored at first.*



A quote by George Lakoff is presented within a dark brown, multi-layered frame. The text is white and set against a black background. The quote discusses cognitive frames and how they influence our perception of the world, specifically mentioning that facts not in line with 'common sense' are excluded from our reasoning.

We all have deep-seated cognitive frames. These frames establish what is “common sense” to us - what we believe to be true about the world.

Facts that are not in line with our “common sense” frames will be excluded.

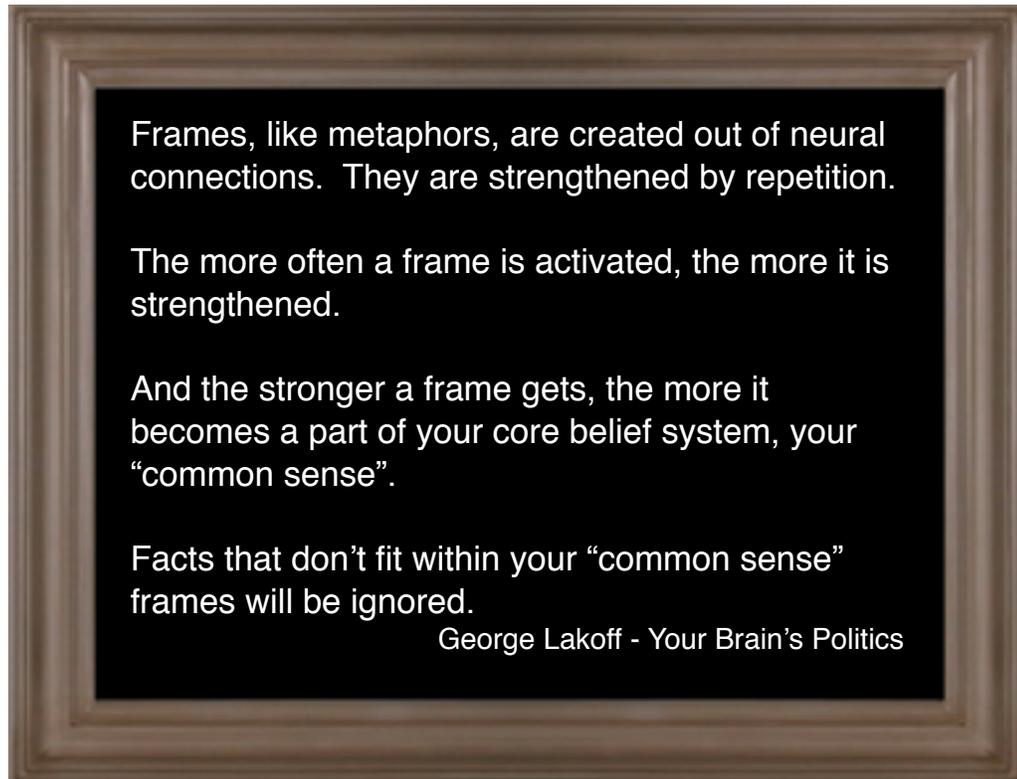
They don’t enter into our reasoning because they have no place in the frames that govern our perceptions of the world.

George Lakoff - Your Brain's Politics

*Every time we think—any thought at all—our brain activates a frame. Frames are cognitive configurations that structure our world knowledge and make sense of information.”*

*“There are deep-seated cognitive frames that structure our thoughts. One can think of those frames as establishing what’s “common sense” to us—what we believe to be true about the world.*

*Now, facts that are not in line with our “common sense” understanding of the world will, figuratively speaking, bounce off our deep-seated frames. They don’t enter into our reasoning because they have no place in the frames that govern our perceptions of the world, or, in this case, our perception of a political leader or candidate.”*



*”Frames, like metaphors, are grounded in the structures of our brains and strengthened via repetition. If you hear a frame over and over again, then your brain develops the neural circuitry that manifests and reinforces that frame in your mind. The more often it gets activated, the more it is strengthened over time. And the stronger a frame gets, the more it becomes part of your common sense. And facts that don’t fit within our commonsensical frames will usually be ignored.” George Lakoff “Your Brain’s Politics*

## The Connection To Horse Training

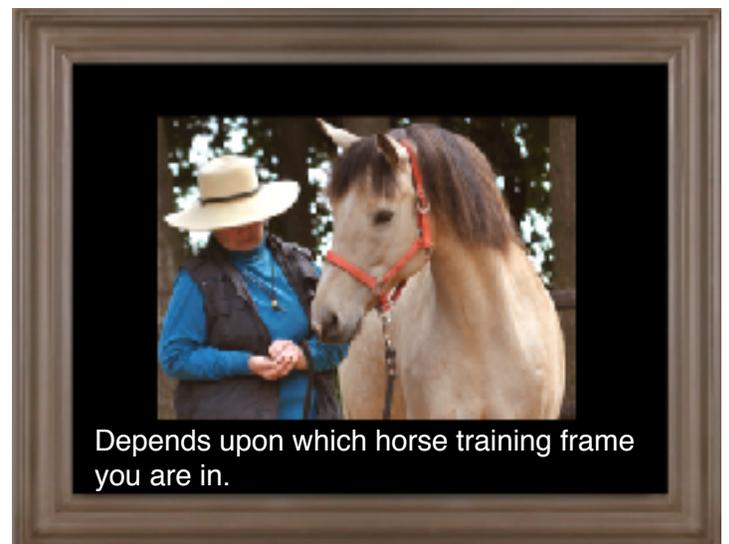
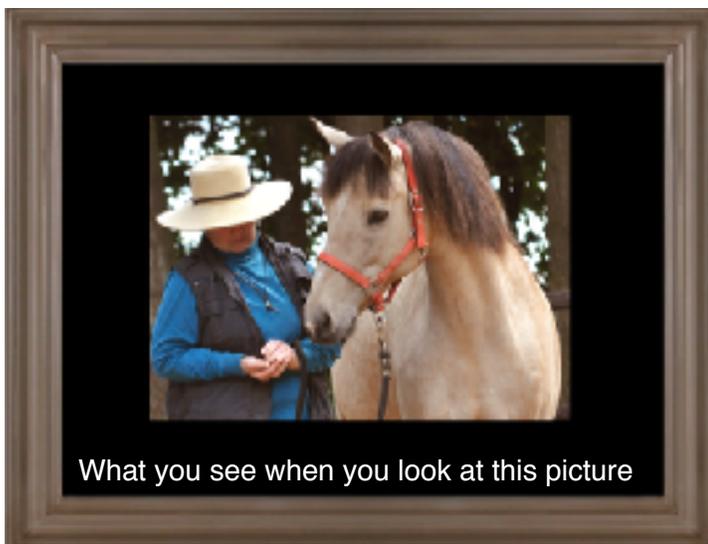
### The Three Layers Of Training

In my introductory talks on clicker training I say to people that there are three layers to every training method. It doesn't matter what type of training it is: conservative or progressive, there are still three layers: the belief system, the organizing principles that grow out of that belief system and the actual methods that are used.

Belief systems are curious things. We attract evidence that supports them. An underlying part of the belief system of conservative training is that horses are stupid animals. If you say this often enough, you will strengthen this frame and you will only be able to process experiences that support it.

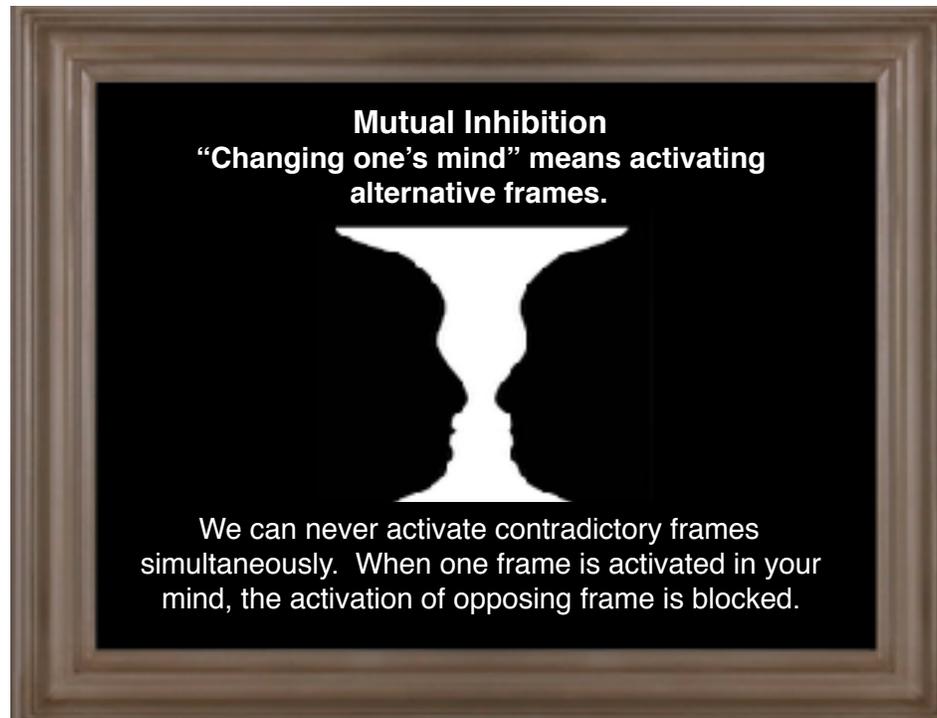
My deep seated cognitive frame says that horses are intelligent. That frame has been reinforced throughout my life. I do regard it as common sense, and I do not understand how anyone could think otherwise. There is so much evidence to support this view. This is evidence which my frames allow me to process.

If I want to get more people to give clicker training a try, I need to pay attention to what Lakoff is saying about frames.



## The Illusion of Facts

*“Facts themselves will rarely change how we reason about the world. Conceptual change occurs through the activation and strengthening of alternative frames. “Changing one’s mind” means to activate alternative frames. . . We can never activate contradictory frames simultaneously. When one frame is activated in your mind, the activation of opposing frames is being blocked. This is called mutual inhibition.”*



Think of some of the classical optical illusion you’ve seen. In one, at first you may see only a white vase in the middle of the picture. But look a little longer and the vase will disappear. Now all you can see are two faces silhouetted in black facing one another. Blink and the faces disappear, and now the vase is back. Once you’ve seen both, you can switch at will back and forth. You can see the faces, or you can see the vase. But you cannot see both at the same time.

*“Because the two interpretations of the visual input contradict each other, our brain picks one over the other at any given moment in time. Our brain can only activate one of two contradictory frames at a time.*

*The way we process facts depends on what frame is active in our mind at a given moment. If a fact fits with a frame that is already active in our minds or is part of what*

*we perceive as common sense, then it's easily understood. If a fact doesn't fit into whatever frame is already activated and is not a part of our common sense, then it will not be readily understood."*



We've all had this experience: You are explaining something that makes perfect sense to you. But you can see a deer-in-the-head-lights glazed look coming over your listener. What you are saying seems so straight forward. It may even be this explanation of frames, but you can see that it is not making sense. Now you understand why. It is not making sense because you have not begun by activating a frame that these new ideas will fit into.

This metaphor of a conceptual frames is one I am familiar with. I recognize that very little of what I teach falls within the norms of conventional horse training. Before someone can understand and be effective with my work, I need to help them build a frame for it. People often jump in unprepared. They have a quick glance at clicker training. It looks easy enough. They aren't thinking about their years of indoctrination into the Strict Parent school of horse training. They just see the surface. You like something, so you click and hand your horse a treat. But then your horse wants the goodies. He's all excited because your pockets are filled with treats. He starts mugging you - a perfectly

normal reaction. You can't help it. Your brain acts before you can filter your choices. You reach up and smack your horse for intruding into your space.

Oops.

So now you're in conflict. You've seen others get good results from clicker training. You want to give it a try. But you can't let your horse crowd you like that! You feel so torn. There is the need to balance the accounts by punishing him, but you're listening to the experienced clicker trainers who are telling you you'll poison the process. What do you do?

Now we can put a name to the problem. You are caught in a strict parent frame. Knowing that means we also know what to do. You need to begin by changing the language in a way that changes your frame of reference.



## Focus on What You Want



One of the main tenets of clicker training is we need to focus on what we want, not the unwanted behavior. This is wiser than we think.

Lakoff uses this example: He asks his audience to become very quiet. And then he says, “This is what I want you to do for me: don’t think of an elephant!”



I’d like you to do the same. Don’t think of an elephant.

What do you think of? An elephant.

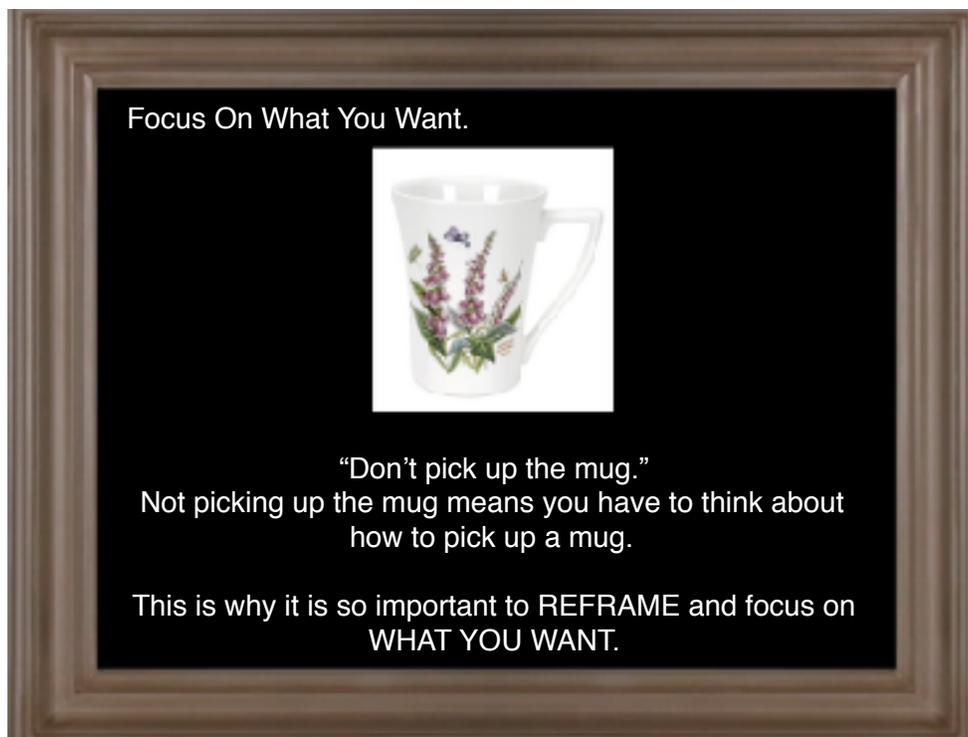
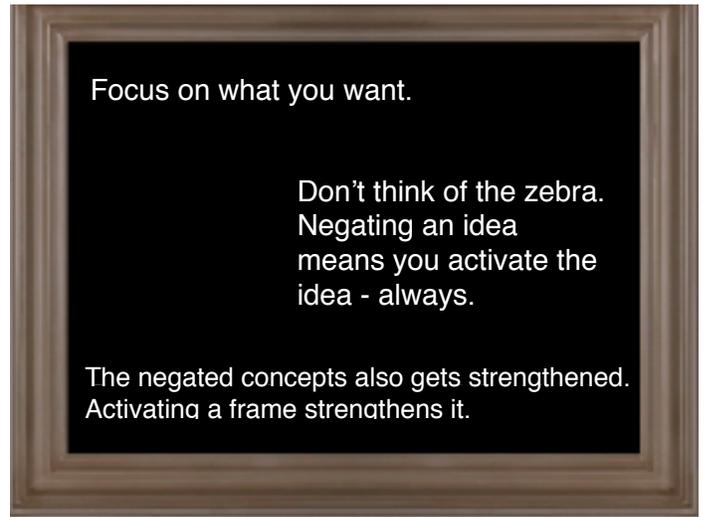
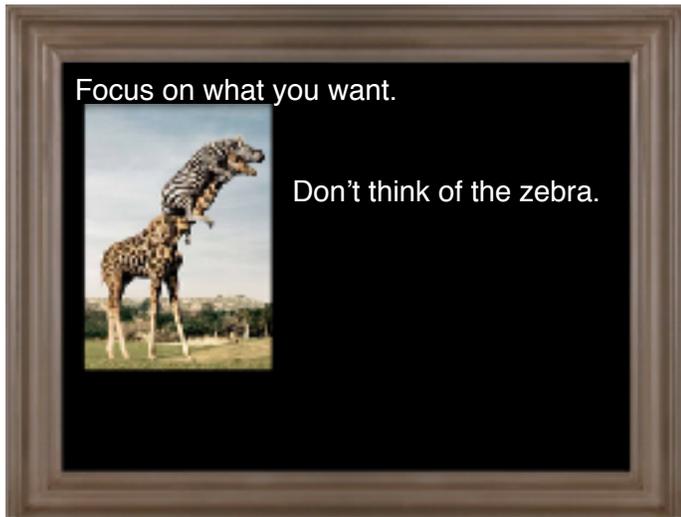
*"In order to comprehend what not to think about, you need to first activate the image of whatever it is that you’re not supposed to think about—otherwise, you won’t know what not to think about!"*

*And so when I tell students, “Don’t think of an elephant,” they automatically activate a*

*frame that encompasses whatever it is they know about elephants. Negating an idea means activating that idea. Always.*

*And not only that, the negated concept also gets strengthened in the listener's mind, because activating a frame strengthens it.*

*Every word evokes a frame. Every negation of a frame activates that frame. Activating a frame means to cognitively and neurally strengthen it.*



*Frames that are strengthened via constant linguistic repetition become common sense, which means that we no longer question the validity of those frames and accept them as, well, objectively right and real. All of this is largely unconscious. Moreover, we cannot simultaneously think about issues in terms of frames that contradict each other. And we ignore facts that don't fit into the frames we are using at a given point in time.” Lakoff*

### **Focus on What You Want**

So both in politics and in horse training, the more we push against what we don't want, the stronger we make it. If we really want to convince people to try clicker training, we need to avoid talking about how “wrong” the other ways of training are.

That's not because we want to stand on the moral high ground. That's not what this is about. It is simply this: I want to activate only the frames that I want to strengthen. I do that by focusing on what I want. As soon as I tell you what I don't like about someone else's training, I am actually making it easier for you to accept their work as common sense.

Oh dear! It can feel so good at times to have a good grumble about what someone else is doing, but my goodness we do so at our own expense!

You don't want to argue *against* what someone else is doing. Talk about what you *want* to do. Activate the frames that will let your listener hear what you are saying.

### **Summary from George Lakoff's The Brain's Politics**

- *Every word evokes a frame.*
- *Every negation of a frame activates that frame.*
- *Activating a frame means you strengthen it.*
- *Frames that are strengthened via constant linguistic repetition become common sense.*
- *That means that we no longer question the validity of those frames and accept them as right and real.*
- *All of this is largely unconscious.*
- *We can't simultaneously activate conflicting frames.*
- *Facts that don't fit into the frames we are using are ignored.*

## What's In A Name

Here's a great example from the world of politics that George Lakoff uses to illustrate how to use language to evoke different frames.

When a politician talks about “tax relief”, they are using a metaphor that fits with Strict Father ideals.



*"Taxes are metaphorically a burden that you can be relieved from; therefore taxes are bad. And in the eyes of conservatives, taxes are in fact a burden to people, and taxation is something that limits people's freedom.*

*Speaking of “tax relief” is in sync with that perspective. Within this frame, tax increases are by definition bad, because they further burden and harm citizens. Tax cuts, in contrast, are by definition good, because they relieve us. In the Strict Father worldview, high taxes are an immoral punishment of self-discipline. What the “tax relief” frame hides, though, is the fact that people who are economically successful have built that success largely on the basis of the tax-supported public infrastructure.”*

When progressives use the phrase tax relief in arguing against conservative tax policies, they are working against their own interests. They are activating the conservatives frame. Remember, I don't want you to think about an elephant.

## Focus On What You Want



High taxes punish self-discipline.  
They limit freedom.  
Taxes are an immoral burden.  
A burden is something you can be *relieved* from.  
Tax increases are bad because they burden citizens.  
Tax cuts are good because they *relieve* us.

Tax Relief

The Conservative/Strict Father Model

**Tax Policy:**  
An example of two ways of framing a policy decision

When progressives use the phrase “tax relief” in arguing against conservative tax policies, they are working against their own interests.

They are activating the conservative’s frame.

Remember, I don’t want you to think about an elephant.

Tax Relief

The Progressive Counter Argument

## Focus On What You Want



High taxes punish self-discipline.  
They limit freedom.  
Taxes are an immoral burden.  
A burden is something you can be *relieved* from.  
Tax increases are bad because they burden citizens.  
Tax cuts are good because they *relieve* us.

Tax Relief

The Conservative/Strict Father Model

**Tax Policy:**  
An example of two ways of framing a policy decision

From horse training we know:

You can’t take away something without putting something else in it’s place.

So how should a progressive talk about taxes?

The Commonwealth Principle of Taxes  
Progressive/Nurturing Parent Model

## Focus On What You Want



## Tax Policy An example of two ways of framing a policy decision

High taxes punish self-discipline.  
They limit freedom.  
Taxes are an immoral burden.  
A burden is something you can  
be *relieved* from.  
Tax increases are bad because  
they burden citizens.  
Tax cuts are good because they  
*relieve* us.

Tax Relief  
The Conservative/Strict Father Model

Individual success relies on public  
infrastructure which everyone helps  
to build and maintain. Those who use  
the infrastructure the most should  
give back more than others.

Paying taxes: You are giving back  
what the public has invested in you.  
Rich people who avoid taxes are  
trying to get a free ride at the  
expense of others.

The Commonwealth Principle of Taxes  
Progressive/Nurturing Parent Model

According to Lakoff, the progressives should talk instead *"about taxation in terms of the commonwealth principle. They should talk about the fact that individual success, liberty, and happiness rely on the public infrastructure that we all built and are maintaining together. They should talk about the fact that those who use this infrastructure the most—to run their businesses and make a profit—should give back more than others. They could also talk about the fact that contributing taxes partly means to simply give back what the government has already invested in you. Once that frame is established, the question is: are you paying back your dues, or are you trying to get a free ride?"*

*Linguistic frames that would stem from this type of moral reasoning would define the issue of taxation in entirely different terms! By using certain frames in public discourse, we define what a given issue is about. We define what it is that we are debating—long before we get into the details of the debates, long before the battle over solutions, facts, and details ever start!”*

I cite this example not to take a stance one way or the other on taxes, but to show how much the public discourse is influenced by the frames we use. So the question is what frames do we want to build around clicker training?

**Focus On What You Want**



**Two ways of framing a policy decision**

By using the metaphors and language that trigger a given frame, we define what an issue is about.

So what frames do we want to build around clicker training?

The Conservative/Strict Father Model      The Progressive/Nurturing Parent Model

This may help us frame the answer:

*“Every political argument ought to start with a moral premise, with an answer to the question: what is morally right or wrong policymaking on this issue? Issue stances are symbolic of the moral stances we hold. They are an outcome of one’s moral worldview and therefore must be communicated as such. However, a lot of folks believe that positions are “values” in and of themselves. They mistake their positions for their values. When asked what their values are, politically involved people will often answer, “My values are environmental protection, public healthcare, and social equality.*

*Those are not values. Those are merely positions that share a common moral basis, they stem from one and the same moral worldview, which in this case is probably a progressive Nurturant Parent worldview with the central values of empathy, nurturance, and individual as well as social responsibility. If you seek political support, then you need to speak about your values as clearly as you can, because your values are what distinguishes you from your political opponent.*

*It does not suffice to just tell people what you will do. You need to tell them why you are going to do it, that is, why the actions you propose are a moral necessity.” George Lakoff  
The Brain’s Politics*



If we want to expand the number of people who are clicker training, we need to begin with our values. We need to create frames that develop into deep-seated cognitive templates in people’s minds.

That’s what the political conservatives have been doing for decades and it is why they are winning elections. It may appear to progressives that people are voting against their own interests, but they are very much voting for their deep seated values.

Remember we all understand the strict and nurturant world views. Some people use only one worldview in all areas of their lives, whether it be politics or horse training. But many of us can switch back and forth. We are biconceptuals.

*“Biconceptuals will be open to seeing matters from either moral worldview, so it’s extremely important to speak about one’s values.”* Biconceptuals will not be able to

apply two conflicting moral frames at once. They will give priority to the worldview that is evoked most strongly in their minds.

### Wanting Both Sides

Biconceptualism is a bit like wanting your cake and eating it, too. It presents an interesting challenge to horse training. When you are first exploring clicker training, you are likely to encounter many training puzzles. Your horse bites you. What do you do?

Do you immediately switch back to your strict parent model and use conservative training techniques to punish his behavior?



Do you keep framing the problem in language that fits with a nurturing parent model?



Or do you find yourself switching back and forth like the people looking at that optical illusion.

I've encountered the third option many times. People are attracted to clicker training. They want to give it a fair test, but they aren't quite ready to give up what they see as their right to punish.



Often this ambivalence sneaks in in ways that take a long time to recognize. The handler is really just airbrushing clicker training onto older frames. This is most easily seen in dog training. Think about obedience trials. Their origin sits firmly in the strict parent world view. The name alone tells us so much. The dog is to sit, stand, lie down, come when called, all with military precision. Accuracy and absolute obedience are measures of success.

Pet owners may never want to enter the obedience ring with their dogs, but they still teach all the behaviors. Sit is classic. You can teach the behavior so easily with clicks and treats. Surely you are being a nurturing, loving pet owner. But

are you? When a friend comes to visit and you cue your dog to sit and then give him treats for responding promptly, are you truly being an empathetic, nurturing caregiver?



Have you recognized your dog's need for social attention and are you satisfying that when you send him to a mat to lie down? You have achieved one goal - a polite, well mannered dog. But have you satisfied his needs?

We are only slowly beginning to see that much of our training has remained in the strict parent frame. We are like the progressives in politics who unwittingly build the case for their opponents by employing their metaphors.

When you teach your dog to sit, have you simply been sugar coating your conservative training? It isn't enough that you are using treats to reward good behavior. *How* isn't enough. You also have to look deep into your values to consider *what* you train and *why*.

### **The Question**

George Lakoff was asked by a friend to come up with a single question for a survey that would let you know if someone was politically conservative or progressive. What would you ask? What are the "tells"? A psychotherapist friend gave Lakoff the answer. Here was the question:

"When your baby cries at night, do you pick him up?" "

When a horse is frightened, do you let her scream, or do you provide comfort?

For me a core value is empathy.

It doesn't matter what type of training we are talking about, conservative or progressive - they all have at their core a set of values, an underlying belief system. Out of the belief system emerge the operating principles. Based on those you choose the "how" of a lesson.



The Strict Father Metaphor explains so many of our traditional horse training practices and beliefs.

If this is your starting point, of course, you will see training in terms of dominance hierarchies.



Of course, you will feel that it is your right, your obligation to enforce your rules.

Of course, you must teach respect through force.

Of course, you must punish bad behavior. Of course you can't let your horse get away with making his own choices.

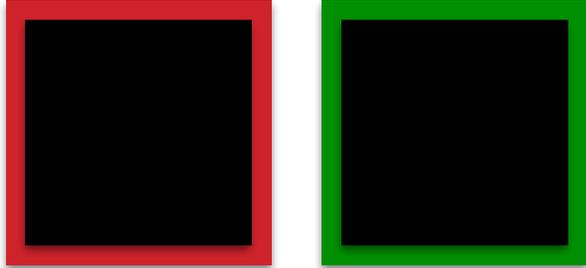
Of course.

Sound familiar. If you've been in the horse world very long, you've seen this kind of horse training. Go to any tack store in the country, and you will see it well represented by the equipment that is being sold. Sometimes it is presented this bluntly, sometimes a little sugar coating is added for the newcomers, but make no mistake, if you or your horse fail to follow the rules, you will be punished.



## Choosing the Frame You Want To Open

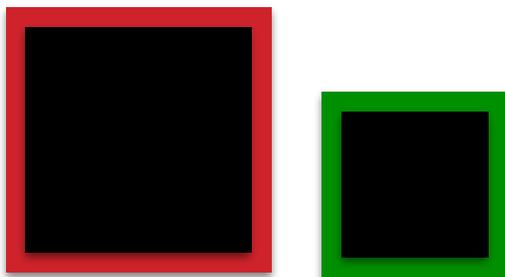
### Which Frame Will You Open?



So what happens if this isn't really your core value system? What if you see the world more as a nurturing parent? You've bought your first horse, and all the experts are telling you you need to get tougher. You need to show him who is boss. This is how horses must be handled.

Given enough exposure, enough repetition, this will become your reference point.

### Which Frame Will You Open?



This isn't a conscious choice any more than linking quantity and verticality was a conscious choice. But if you make the links often enough, your brain will create the connections for you. If you take enough lessons, if you hear the words repeated over and over again, this will begin to be how you think about horses.

It doesn't have to be this way. You can choose the frames you open.

## Coming Home



For Many people clicker training can feel like coming home. The “How”, “What”, and “Why” of training all match up. The training system matches a core nurturing-parent belief system. Others struggle. They flip back and forth between a desire to be kind and a need to punish. Now we understand that they are flipping back and forth between frames.

Over many years of giving clinics I have seen people who have felt a huge sense of relief when they first start clicker training. They have found a training system that matches their nurturing parent beliefs. The “How”, “What”, and “Why” of training all match up. Everything fits within the frame that they want most to open.

Others struggle. They flip back and forth between a desire to be kind and a need to punish. Now we know they are are flipping back and forth between frames.

Since you cannot activate two contradictory frames at the same time, their training must feel like an optical illusion. First they see it as a vase, then as two faces. How confusing.



**Which frame do you want to open?**



**The Strict Father**



**Or the Nurturing Parent**

Which frame do you want to open - the strict father or the nurturing caregiver?  
When you can state very clearly these two core metaphors, it lets you choose.  
Which frame do you want to strengthen? Which frame do you want informing  
your training choices?

You can still hold conservative opinions when it comes to politics or the  
running of your office, but when you exchange your business suit for your  
training vest, are you a strict father, or a nurturing parent?

## Your Homework

Lakoff's work is a call to action. It isn't enough to read his books and think - how interesting, and leave it at that. These concepts demand that you ask: What frame DO I want to activate for myself, for my family, for my horses, for my community, for the planet?

Here's some homework for you:

- 1.) Notice your metaphors.
- 2.) What frame are you activating?  
Is that the frame you wanted?
- 3.) In training are you choosing conservative or progressive frames?  
Are you focused on what you don't want or are you moving towards what you want?
- 4.) How long do you maintain your desired frame? Remember most of us are biconceptuals. We can relate to either frame. When you're with your horse, what bumps you out of a progressive training mindset? How quickly can you reframe to return to that focus?
- 5.) When you can maintain duration in a **progressive** training mindset, your animal learners will welcome you in.





**To Progress forward toward your training goals:**

**Focus on what you WANT.**

**Actively activate the frames that will help you the most.**

**Remember knowing what to train isn't enough.**

**You also want to remember WHY.**

Remember: Most of us are biconceptuals. You can activate a progressive frame when you are training and a conservative frame when you are voting. My point is not to ask you to choose sides - progressive versus conservative. What I am suggesting is that with a growing awareness of your own core values and the metaphors that structure your life, you can now make your choices actively and deliberately.

### **Two Questions**

George Lakoff was asked to come up with only one question for the survey that wanted to identify conservatives and progressives. It's a bit late in the day, but when it comes to choosing someone to run for president, I have two.



The first is a task. It's a bit like a scene from Harry Potter. Each candidate has to play chess with the captain of a high school chess team. The candidate doesn't need necessarily to win, but he has to show me that he can think strategically more than two moves ahead. We need good chess players making decisions for us, people who understand complexity and can see cause and

effect through multiple layers of analysis.

For my second I want to know if the candidate read “Black Beauty” when he was little and did he cry when Ginger died?

Now with our current President-Elect I have no problem believing that he is a strategic thinker and that, yes, he could plan more than two moves ahead. He demonstrated that skill throughout the campaign with opponent after opponent. But I also believe that not only didn’t he cry when Ginger died, he doesn’t even know who Ginger is. I would be very surprised if he ever read “Black Beauty”. And that’s a problem because Black Beauty isn’t just about animal cruelty. It’s about social justice, and most of all it’s about empathy.



That’s the piece that George Lakoff has brought into sharp focus. That’s the piece that for me puts politics and clicker training into the same frame.

Which frame will you open?

Alexandra Kurland  
[theclickercenter.com](http://theclickercenter.com) - January 2017