

# Savvy Lives Over The Silly Bridge

By Dr. Stephanie Burns

Have you ever wondered what kind of learner Pat Parelli had to have been to do what he has done? Have you noticed that from year to year he demonstrates new knowledge and skills when you think there just can't be more? Have you ever observed students in a *Parelli* course and noticed that there are students who learn much more than the others even though they have had the exact same experience? Of course, there are many factors involved, but on my recent visit to the *ISC* in Colorado, one factor stood out above the others. My aim in this article is to share a model that will help you understand that factor. The lessons found in this model may greatly influence the speed and quality of your future learning.

## THE MODEL

I will build the model first and then from it we will draw some ideas important to us as *Parelli* students. It starts with three common labels.

Stupid  
Smart  
Bright

Like it or not we do label people. Some labels relate to the behavior of people as learners. Some people have behaviors that earn them the label "stupid" or "lazy" and "incompetent." These labels might be applied to a person who doesn't know how to do or what they need to do, in order to pass a test or get a job done. These are not particularly nice labels, but are widely used. People even use these labels to define themselves! We can take heart that there was a day when our Savvy String got knotted around the Carrot Stick and we most deservedly achieved the label "incompetent" in *Level 1*.

The outcome when we learn, be that through school or the *Savvy System*, is an intention to move away from "stupid!" We strive to achieve a label in the smart category. If we do this we "fit in" and "look good." To be deemed smart is about knowing just exactly what you need to know or do in order to pass.

Smart people can do all the tasks at the *Level* they are studying. Other people have a set of learning behaviors that take them past the point of being smart. They are perceived as being bright. You know, those students who have "a lot of potential." This is "looking really good."

Bright people can do all of the tasks in their *Level* AND have well studied the *Theory Book* AND did all the extra challenges in the *Pocket Guides*. I would wager a bet that they have read all of the answers that Linda wrote to the questions for the Virtual Instructor in DB's Cabin!

So, there you go. Stupid, smart and bright. To the right of those labels we have three new ones.

Simple  
Genius  
Brilliant

People who achieve the labels on the right side of the model do so in sequence from bottom to top. Clearly some people have a range of learning behavior that takes them way beyond simply what is known, or what can be done! The right side is a whole different kettle of fish.

Brilliant is the label given to people who have studied in depth as bright people do and then experiment wantonly. When Pat encourages us to be creative about how and where and in what circumstance we play the *Seven Games*, this is the door he is inviting you to walk through. In doing this we learn how to use the basic knowledge and skills in many different and sometimes in new ways. This, to me is where you will discover savvy in the *Parelli* program.

Genius is the label given to a person who will invest in learning all that is to be known about something and then rip it apart in the hope of discovering ways of seeing it in a brand new way. What these people do can change how we think and what we believe to be true. Not everyone wants to go where you would have to go nor invest what is necessary to achieve genius. Yet, how many of you have had a fundamental change in how you think about horses since becoming a *Parelli* student? This was possible because at least one person was willing to go there. Thank you Pat.

Simple is the label given to those people who take very great risks. They do everything required of the genius but then strive to make a new way of thinking available to all of us. To do this they go through complexity first, then look for simple

ways to help others see and do these new things. These are people who make a fundamental change in our nature. This can lead to controversy and ridicule for a very large part of any individual life. For us to now be able to learn from Pat Parelli, not simply watch him perform, required that he take this step.

## THE BIG QUESTION

The question now begs to be asked: What is the difference between those who play on the left side of the model from those who achieve the labels of the right?

Larry Wilson, the originator of this model, would say that those on the right have crossed a bridge. The name of this bridge is The Silly Bridge.

Stupid	Simple
Smart	Genius
Bright	Brilliant

====>SILLY BRIDGE <====

What is the Silly Bridge? The Silly Bridge is the decision to NOT care about what other people think during the time when you are learning!

## LEARNING BENEFITS FROM RISKING SELF-IMAGE

Unfortunately, most of us are educated away from crossing the Silly Bridge. It is not a good idea to look stupid in school or in the workplace. That message is made very clear from a very young age. We quickly get the game of “looking smart” to avoid the consequences that fall on those who “look stupid.”

Of course, this is a good motive for doing what you have to do to be smart, but it causes a fear of doing what is necessary to be more than smart. It causes us to not ask questions, to not practice with others around who might help, to not volunteer and to not experiment. We just don’t want to look “silly.” It keeps us from achieving savvy!

Be very clear that if you make the choice to learn, then looking silly, stupid, uncoordinated and slow is going to happen. It is trying to avoid this that causes you to limit yourself to “smart.” It also causes learning to be frustrating, anxiety provoking and unsatisfying. You may stop learning from occurring at all! So, smart people are stuck. Bright people have it even worse! Imagine achieving this glowing label from parents and teachers. How compelled would you be to risk looking “silly” then? Not very! This is one danger with the current labels of bright, gifted and high potential. The message can be: Do whatever it takes to “look good” which is very different from what you have to do to “be good.”

Learning benefits from a willingness to risk your self-image. People who play on the right side of the bridge are willing to look “not cool” while in the process of learning. I had a student once who would not practice the piano when anyone was home. She was concerned that she was not very good and that embarrassed her. Of course, this behavior was not going to help her get good either. And the really silly thing was that NO ONE expected or needed her to be good! She’s a learner! The Silly Bridge Model helped her become a satisfied student and very good pianist!

## IN CLOSING

During my visit to the *ISC* this summer the lessons of the Silly Bridge Model were vibrantly apparent. Some students had learning behaviors that allowed them to take full advantage of what was offered. Others just had never had the opportunity to learn the lesson that caring about what other people think prevents them from learning as fast and as much as they can.

When you next sign on to be a learner think about how important the issue of “appearance” is to you. If it matters a lot then you might think about this as an adult with an important goal that matters to you. You have the best models in learning through *Parelli*. Pat, Linda and many students truly cross the Silly Bridge. They are the ones you see with savvy. Savvy lives on the other side of the Silly Bridge.