

## | Stretch Your Brain

By Linda Parelli

In all my years of riding lessons, I did a lot of things wrong. In fact, because it's human nature to focus on what's going wrong, I felt more of a failure than I did a success. My teachers kept saying No, like this... in an effort to put me on the right track, and nicely as it was done and with as good intention as it was offered, I still felt like a hopeless case... I'm never going to get this...

I did a course some years ago in Sydney, Australia, called Learning to Learn with a remarkable woman named Stephanie Burns. I was exposed to some incredible perceptions around the mental, emotional and physical states of learning and what a teacher could do to cause super-learning to occur. After doing Learning to Learn, I decided to go on and do her course called Training to Train and boy, was that an eye-opener.

One of the exercises we did was to study the difference between teaching by details versus teaching with big picture concepts. We paired up and sat back to back. We each had to do a drawing - a single object, anything we wanted. Then, we had to get the other to draw what we had drawn and there were two ways it was to be done. Person A had to have the other draw what they drew by giving detailed instructions, while Person B had to do it with big picture concepts.

I was Person B and so I gave the big picture instructions and it went like this: OK, it's a large animal. It's facing to the right. Draw a head that is kind of long, narrowing at the nose. Two short, pointy ears that stick up. A long neck with a mane of medium length hair drooping from the top line of it, barrel shaped body, a long-haired tail, four legs and hoofs all standing straight down, the back legs have a kind of elbow in them, poking out the back where the knee would be. All the instructions were timed as she was ready to draw the next bit.

What did she draw? A horse (of course!). Did it look exactly like mine? Well, not exactly, but it was unmistakably a horse. It took less than 10 minutes and we had fun doing it. She also found it easy to follow the directions.

Then my partner had to instruct me using exacting details: From a point in exactly the middle of the page, draw a straight line 3.5 inches directly straight upwards. Now draw a diagonal line downward to the right arriving at a point in line with the base of the first line and about 1.5 inches to the right of this origin. OK, now find a point approximately 4 inches in front of the point of origin and 2 inches down... And the whole thing went like this!! It was a sailing boat, but I didn't know this until more than halfway through the project. It was taxing, I had no concept of what it was I was aiming for, I even felt like a dummy - a puppet with no brain of my own. It took ages, was stressful, I didn't feel confident and it was not fun! My boat, however was very similar to hers.

What a fascinating exercise. The aim was to show us the two styles side by side, appreciate that one gave more accuracy than the other, but at the mental and emotional expense of the student. Using the big picture style the student was more motivated, had more fun, found it easy, was not so obsessed with detail and making a mistake. And they felt like they knew where they were going so they were much more confident. They could also now improve what they had done if that was the idea.

I have spent more than 17 years teaching adults. I began by teaching professional skin therapy, then moved into teaching customer relations and then into teaching the Parelli training system three years ago.

What fascinated me the most when I started teaching was how scared people are of making a mistake. Most of us have been through a schooling or parenting system that scolded mistakes, your peers made you feel dumber than dumb for any failure and pretty soon we learned to stay quiet instead of volunteer a suggestion or answer for fear of being wrong or ridiculed.

I learned (through courses such as Stephanie Burns' and another American, Robert Kiyosake - author of the book, If You Want to be Rich and Happy, Don't Go to School), that before people can learn, two things have to happen: They have to feel safe and supported, have no fear of criticism; and the brain has to be excited.