Scientific Method

According to Wikipedia, "The scientific method is an empirical method of acquiring knowledge that has characterized the development of science since at least the 17th century. It involves careful observation, applying rigorous skepticism about what is observed, given that cognitive assumptions can distort how one interprets the observation."

Scientists create a hypothesis based on their previous understanding, and then design an experiment to test that hypothesis. They use the data they gather as a result to inform their next experiment, and there's no such thing as a failure, as they're continually learning from the results.

As horse trainers, we use our previous experiences and knowledge to make a training plan, but unfortunately we tend to allow our emotions to cloud our evaluation of the results. We think horses are "being bad" or "being stubborn" when they're just telling us that they don't yet understand what we're asking, or that something is bothering them.

If we approached our horsemanship more like a scientist, we could look at the information we gather from each attempt dispassionately and use it to inform – and improve – our next efforts.

Instead of taking it personally or getting frustrated when things aren't going the way we thought they would, we can evaluate what's happening, and think critically about the variables involved, and see what happens if we make a change on our next effort.

We can use this same method to evaluate our own skills. Understanding when we are most likely to react poorly can help us minimize how often it happens. Using video can help us see more clearly what was effective and where we could improve.

It can help to remember that just like our horses, we're learning every day, and we need to give ourselves the time and space to improve, just as we do our horses.

Approaching training scientifically can allow both our horses and ourselves continue to learn and improve.