

Who will change the Paradigm?

There's no question about it, research on the horse's foot is booming. As the horse population ages, concerns over foot related injuries and lameness associated with the lower limb becomes insurmountable. Educated horse owners are looking to the professionals for answers, often becoming disenchanting by the redundancy of their antiquated approaches to the treatment of these problems.

The decade of the hoof – an initiative to promote natural hoof care and research of the wild horse during the 1990's – may or may have not run its course, but it is as if it were just an opening act.

With numerous equine research projects underway, the complex genetic and environmental interplay that shapes the equine foot and determines its demise is an area that is ripe for study. But who will do the research and how will the found knowledge be utilized? The question is: will the minds that breathe life into the struggling farrier sciences come from the ranks of today's farrier's schools? Or will they come from the hallowed halls of the coveted veterinarian university? These are the questions that I asked myself while pondering what direction I wanted to take the International Institute of Equine Podiatry. I decided to take a good close look at the educational systems that were producing today's hoof care professionals.

Most farriers schools attract and accommodate those students that wish to enter a *trade*, those hoping to be able to make a better than average income and to do so while having to meet only limited academics requirements. As an example: In the UK, the farrier student must attend one of the nation's approved farrier colleges, the actual semesters for academic study at these colleges is eight weeks the first year, six for the second, four for the third, and two weeks in the fourth and final year. The remainder of the student's education is spent in apprenticeship with an approved mentor, the master farrier. It is likely that it has only been in the past decade that you would find a teacher (master farrier) that would have attended college themselves. The reason; it was in the mid 70's is when the registries began and at that time most all working farriers fell under a grandfather clause and did not have to attend college. In many cases these same farriers would take an apprentice under this new system.

Though this system may be flawed, it remains far superior to any other form of farrier educational system in the world today. In the United States for instance there is no regulation of the farrier trade. Formal education is strictly voluntary and as a result quality varies greatly. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that education in the farrier sciences does not exist, on the contrary, it exist alright, but we need to accept the fact that growth of the farrier sciences is non existent and that we need to find a way to revive an obviously obsolete science.

I believe that if we are to see advances in the understanding and treatment of the equine foot, we need to create a *profession* that will attract those minds that will accelerate the science of hoof care, minds that will take the farrier sciences out of the Victorian era and into the twenty first century.

It is my belief that the science of Applied Equine Podiatry holds the key to understanding the equine foot and the practice of Applied Equine Podiatry will define the newest equine related profession, one that will attract the kinds of minds we need to advance the science.

Let me share this bit of proof with you. Attendance to the Institute's five day courses on the science of Applied Equine Podiatry has grown steadily over the past four years. Enrollment in the Institute's full time diploma program has also shown a dramatic increase in the last twenty four months, so much so that it dictates our company's expansion.

Of interest are the demographics of the students interested in natural hoof care or AEP as a career. The demographics of the Institute's students may be a good indication of where performance hoof care needs to go, where it is going. Our students range in average age from 24 to 54 and most have a high level of formal education, many holding advance degrees. What is the reason for this? What attracts this type of person to a profession that in many eyes is reserved for those having a stronger propensity toward the physical attributes? I think the answer is; a common desire, a desire to improve the quality of life of today's horse. Many students come to us because they are disappointed in what their farrier and veterinarian have had to offer. Some felt a strong desire to move toward that which appeared more natural. Why they come to AEP is important, but not as important as their thirst for knowledge, it is this thirst that is the fuel that will advance Applied Equine Podiatry as a science. Applied Equine Podiatry as a profession is proving to be a viable alternative to the farrier trade.

There are reasons why the farrier sciences are faltering. The lack of taking responsibility is likely the biggest culprit in the scheme of it all. The act of taking responsibility for the health of the equine foot has been averted since the inception of the veterinary profession. The reason is simple; because the act of shoeing is and always has been viewed as a tedious task that was to be fulfilled by the *tradesman or craftsman*. When veterinary colleges were formed, those students in attendance were not your local blacksmith. The division began then and it remains today. Today's farrier is for them most part an educated craftsman, but the education that the *science* provides these craftsmen is far from adequate.

Beyond the ineffective science, there is another problem that effects even the finest of craftsman. I say it often; today's farrier has not been given an adequate model to follow. How can we expect a craftsman to perform even the most basic of task without an appropriate model? The model in use by today's farrier may have sufficed one hundred years ago, before the technology could provide more, but things have changed.

Today's farrier has lost a great deal of the horse owner's respect and perhaps, if they are willing to change, they can regain some of that respect. What today's farrier needs is a change of practice. What will bring about this change, change in the farrier paradigm. I learned some time ago that the quickest way to change a person's paradigm was to change their name. You read it correctly, change their name. A change in name will create a change of attitude, not only in that person, but a change of attitude by all that interact with that person. With a change of attitude comes a change of practice. If the change in attitude is a positive one, then the change in practice will also be a positive one. I have chosen to call the Institute's educated hoof care provider an "Applied Equine Podiatrist". The name exudes positive attitude and attracts persons with the right attitude, the attitude to initiate positive change in a field that once satisfied the needs of those not willing to take on the responsibility.

Dr. Karen Hayes states it well in her book, *The Perfect Stall* "Tradition is a polite way of saying, stuck in the past". Try to imagine where the veterinary sciences would be if they stuck with *tradition*. We do not need another form of shoeing; we need a whole new science, one that will continue to evolve, and a science that will support a *profession*.

You may have seen on the Institute's web site that our diploma program has been added to the available programs offered students at Post University in Connecticut? Robyn and I recently met with Patricia Sander, college president and Carol Baker, direct of equine studies to discuss the equine industry as it pertains to their students. Carol Baker stated that the college needed to change its emphasis from *riding to profession* if it wanted to meet the needs of future equine students. There are good career opportunities for today's student within the equine industry, but fewer and fewer involve riding or riding instruction. All in attendance agreed that Applied Equine Podiatry offers their students an added profession within the equine industry that is progress, exciting, and rewarding.

Why has all this come about? Because today's hoof care provider is being forced to accept the fact that many of today's Horse Owners are willing to take on the responsibilities of proper hoof care and have the *desire to question, explore and learn*. They must accept that in many instances the Horse Owner's knowledge of the equine foot exceeds their own. It is a fact that the Farrier and Veterinarian no longer hold a monopoly on knowledge. It is you, the horse owner that has taken on the responsibility of developing a new paradigm for the treatment and care of the equine foot. In the same way that it has been for centuries, the Horse Owner has the power to spur change. The farrier and veterinarians can deny it no longer; the dedicated Horse Lover will change the way we care for our equine wards, today and in the future.