

## Hoof Care as a Business - Is A Career in Hoof Care Right for You?



Our thanks go to Cindy "Hawk" Sullivan for permission to share her excellent advice here. Cindy was the first clinician on our farm in 2001 to share the basics of barefoot hoof care and therewith started my own journey into a fascinating world.

[This is a long document with a lot of repetition of what is said in other articles in this section, but it may serve you well]

You love horses and you want to own your own business. The ideal scenario is to combine the two, a business of your own that incorporates horses. That's all it takes to make hoof care the perfect business for you, right? Wrong! Hoof care is not for everyone. In addition to the physical demands of trimming and handling horses, a hoof care practitioner must be knowledgeable, professional, diplomatic and be willing to invest a great deal of time reaching customers and managing his, or her, business.

Let's do a little soul searching to see if this is the business for you. Be completely honest with yourself as you give some thought to the topics in this section.

### Do you like to travel?

If you are the type of person who likes to stick close to home, then hoof care may not be the business for you. Unless you happen to live next door to a 300 head horse farm and they are your sole customer, then you will likely have to travel, in some cases over an hour, or more, one way.

You can make it a policy not to take customers over a certain radius from your home — say 50 miles. However, unless you are in an area that is particularly open-minded and full of horse owners just waiting for a natural hoof care practitioner to grace them, you won't have much work if you stick too close to home, not to mention all those horses out there in desperate need that have no one nearby to help them become healthier, happy and sound.



Because what we do is different and there are so few of us out there presently, there are countless horses and owners out there in need of your services; some are in desperate situations, facing euthanasia for "incurable" lameness. Chances are the ones that need you the most will be the farthest away. If you are not willing to travel (within reason, of course) to reach those in dire need, then that would be an indicator that this may not be the profession for you.

### What time do you get up in the morning?

So, you're not a "morning person?" If you have difficulty rising early and being able to function fairly intelligently, you may not be suited for a business that takes you on the road. As you build your business, you will need to "schedule your day" in an efficient manner such that you are able to reach as many customers as possible with a minimum of unproductive travel. Otherwise, you will have difficulty making ends meet, especially with the high prices of gasoline these days. To be most effective, you will need to start many days quite early to get on the road to your first customer of the day and still have plenty of daylight left for all the others in your schedule.



### Are you a weather weenie?

Do you relish snuggling by your fireplace in winter and basking in your air-conditioning during the hot summer months? Here, where I live in the Northeast Georgia Mountains, we have one of the highest annual rainfall amounts in the United States. If I was not willing to go out and trim horses in the rain, slogging through



the mud along the way, I would have very few customers. If you live farther north, you will have to deal with snow and ice in the winters, in some areas for weeks, or months at a time. Your customers' horses are not going to suck it up and stop growing hooves while you wait for the weather to clear. Assuming your personal safety is not at risk from driving on badly maintained winter roads, you need to be willing to go out in the cold and slush to care for them. Conversely, if you live in southern, arid climates, summer heat will be your biggest challenge. In some areas temperatures frequently soar over 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade! Trimming horses in extremely high heat can challenge you

physically, and can be downright dangerous.

### How's your health?

It should be clear to you by now, if it was not already, that you will need to be in good physical condition if you want a career as a hoof care professional. You do not have to be a large, heavily muscled man to do this work, some of the best hoof care practitioners out there are rather small-framed women. Hoof care is as much about working smart as it is about working hard. Many women and smaller men have learned to use their bodies efficiently. However, if you have any unstable medical conditions that would put you at risk when your body is stressed by physical demands and extreme temperatures, then hoof care is not for you. That said, even practitioners in perfect health will eventually suffer the wear and tear of what is an inherently physically demanding and sometimes downright dangerous job. Not all of the horses you will be asked to trim will behave well. Even the most well trained horses can have a bad day. You are always facing the risk of getting kicked, bitten, or stepped on. Arthritis, back pain, worn out knees, repetitive motion disorders - like carpal tunnel syndrome, or tendonitis - are constant companions of hoof care practitioners who enjoy long careers.



### How's your temperament?

How well do you handle stress? Are you quick to anger? Can you deal with irrational people and/or unruly horses without losing your temper? For the most part, the customers with whom you work will be wonderful people, but some will be somewhat less-than-wonderful. Generally they don't mean to be. They may be under a great deal of stress, worried over the welfare of their horse, have had bad experiences with past hoof care providers, or any number of things. You will need to be sympathetic and understanding in order to build a good working relationship. You also need to be savvy enough to recognize individuals who are just impossible to please and be able to walk away diplomatically. You do not have to be at their mercy, nor should you have to take abuse from a customer. Just as most human customers will be nice people, for the most part, the horses you care for will be well behaved. However, occasionally you will be asked to trim a horse that has significant behavior problems. It could be that they were abused in the past and learned not to trust people, or that they were never handled or trained properly, and they lack respect for people. Such horses will be the extreme of those that will try your patience. More common will be horses that are just "brats." They are usually young horses that are fidgety and mischievous, and cause you to work harder than the quiet well-mannered older horse. Losing your temper and taking it out on the horse in some form of physi-



cal punishment (for example: hitting the horse with your rasp) is never a good idea. There will be times when your carefully planned day falls entirely to pieces. Getting stuck in traffic for hours, making you late for your first and subsequently all the other appointments of the day, is fairly common if you travel through major metropolitan areas regularly. If you are unable to shrug off the tension and stress this creates, then your temper will be short and your patience even shorter as the day wears on and fatigue adds to the mix. Many times, and for many reasons, your patience will be tested. If you tend to be uptight and reactionary, this business is not for you.



#### **How dependable are you?**

Do you show up on time, or are you always running late? Do people trust you to keep your word? Are you basically an honest person? Dependability is a major factor in building a successful hoof care business. The number one complaint among horse owners relative to hoof care is that the farrier that doesn't show up on time, or at all. Your trustworthiness is vital in this business. Much of your future business will be from word of mouth and your reputation is worth more than any amount of fancy marketing you might do. You must be able to keep appointments as scheduled unless you and the customer have mutually agreed

to change the date, or time, of your visit, or (with the exception of unforeseen, or emergency circumstances) you have given adequate notice to the customer that you need to reschedule their appointment. In addition to being dependable, you need to be trustworthy. Most likely, many of your customers will have jobs during the week. Unless you plan to only trim on weekends, the customer may not always be able to be present when you come to trim. If they agree to allow you to come and trim while they are at work, then you need to be someone they can trust to have on their property and around their horses in their absence.



#### **Do you have a dependable vehicle?**

Perhaps this is just too obvious to mention, but indulge me! As your business grows you will be doing more and more traveling as you make your rounds. Mileage quickly adds up. The benefit of being a Natural Hoof Care Provider as opposed to being a traditional farrier is that you have very little equipment to carry about with you. You can work out of a Volkswagen if you like. Regardless of what vehicle you use, it needs to be kept in good running condition. Every day that it spends in the shop means horses are not getting the care they need, not to mention that your income is suffering as well. If you live in an area with rugged terrain, you might consider forgoing the Volkswagen Bug and opting for something with 4-wheel drive.

You will be amazed at some of the places into which you will be expected to drive to reach your equine customers! Well, now that you have had time to think it over, are you still with me? Do you still want to go into this business? Yes? EXCELLENT! Then let us move on!





Before "hanging your shingle" and heading off on rounds, give some serious thought to how you wish to structure your business. There are many mundane details to get out of the way, and it is best to do your homework (and paperwork) before you get too busy taking care of horses! Issues you need to address are as simple as the name by which you want to have your business known, to more complex issues such as the legal structure under which you want your business to operate.

## Name

While seemingly the simplest part of starting your business, selecting the name of your business is more important than you think



— and may be more difficult than it would seem! The name of your business can be your own name, or it can be a name descriptive of the service you provide. If you decide to use a descriptive name, it should be one that you will be happy to live with long term. Trying to change your name after you are established creates unnecessary confusion for customers, as well as needless expense for you. Choose a name that will be easy for the public to remember. It should be short, easy to say, and easy to understand. Avoid complicated terms and wordy phrases. The challenge here is in the fact that nearly everyone in this business could call their business "Natural Hoof Care" and, in fact, many do. It's a good name, but how will

anyone differentiate you from a myriad of others nearby calling their business by the same name?

## Logo



A logo is simply a graphic design that identifies your service in some way and becomes a part of your business identity. It will become your trademark whether you register it, or not. Logically, it will be some type of horse graphic, or it can be a graphic of a bare hoof. Many practitioners who choose to use a graphic simply use horse clip art freely available in the public domain on the internet. Some have taken actual photographs of a horse, horses, or a healthy bare hoof and developed it into a logo. In developing your own logo, my best advice is to keep it simple. It should be attractive, memorable, and descriptive. Many people have a tendency to put all their creative energy into designing a detailed logo, but I want to caution you on this tactic. The logos with the most impact are the simplest. Consider such huge corporations as CocaCola®, IBM®, Kodak® and the like. While they certainly

have the resources to come up with the finest art for a logo, they do not because the simpler, the better, and the most memorable. Simple line art or clip art with a minimum of colors will be most effective, and certainly the least expensive to produce. Keep in mind that the more colors you have in your logo, the more the printer will charge to produce it on your marketing material. If you decide to create a logo, give it careful consideration as it will be with you, and a reflection of you, for a long time.

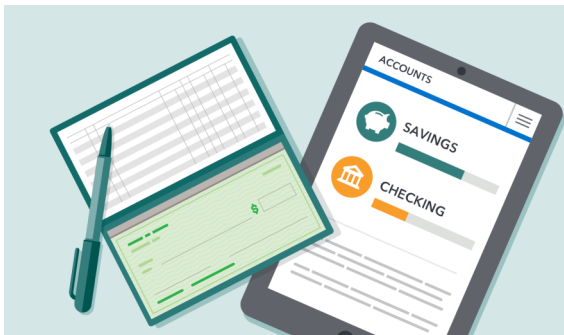
## Basic Business Structures



This book is not intended to provide professional advice on business practices and legalities. I suggest you do some research on the internet, or at your local library to gain a basic idea of the options available to you in setting up a legal business. Once you have some basic knowledge, you should consult a CPA or business attorney to help you decide on and finalize your business structure. The time you take on the front end setting up your business will be well spent ensuring that your business runs smoothly and you avoid unforeseen legal snags that can cost you dearly down the line. The choices of business structures are Sole Proprietorships, Partnerships, LLCs (Limited

Liability Corporation), Corporations, and Cooperatives. Most likely, in this business, you will choose to operate as a sole proprietorship. With a sole proprietorship, you need only two things: a business license, and — unless you are using your own name — a doing business as (DBA) statement, which you file with your state. Otherwise, this business structure requires little paperwork and can be set up easily. For tax purposes, your sole proprietorship is no different than you — you file your business taxes on your personal tax form. The next most common structure for this type of business is an LLC, where there is a certain amount of asset protection. There is a huge amount of information on the internet about setting up a business. Do your research to gain a working knowledge of the choices available to you, and the pros and cons of each. Then, it would be wise for you to consult a professional to assure your business is set up properly and legally.

### Checking Account



Adding up income and expenses over the course of a year can be a daunting task if you are not organized and prepared. My CPA urged me to open a checking account apart from my personal account for all deposits and expense payments to pass through. "That way," he said, "it will be very easy to tally up at the end of the year for tax purposes." Did I listen to him? NO! Not at first. However, after the first tax season of spending hours and HOURS sifting through mixed records to distill out income and expenses related only to my hoof care business...I realized the wisdom of his advice. Listen to your

accountant!



### Sales Tax

Most practitioners provide some goods in addition to service to their equine clients. The most common items in inventory are hoof boots. The sale of goods is taxable in most states. Even if you choose not to sell goods, some states may still require you to collect sales and service tax. You would be wise to research state and local sales tax requirements and regulations for your area. This web site has links to every state <http://www.taxsites.com/state.html>. Also, check on state and federal income tax requirements for your area. If your state requires that you collect sales tax,

you will need to complete forms to receive a sales tax identification number. You will also receive a payment schedule and forms for sending in your payments which may be monthly, quarterly or annually, depending upon your state's requirements.



### Part Time or Full Time?

Whether you trim horses full time as your sole occupation, or part time as an adjunct to an existing job, is a decision to which you should give some thought. Your current financial situation will no doubt be a factor in your deliberations about starting off full time, or part time. A stable, broad customer base is not built overnight and as such your income from your hoof care business will be low initially. Many people opt to begin at part time

status — working on weekends and in the evenings. Once the business is built up enough, you can "quit your day job" and go full time if that is your intent. Some people do not intend to completely change careers and choose to work at their hoof care business part time and keep it that way. If that is what you choose, consider setting boundaries early on, such as how many days a week you will devote to trimming, or how far you will agree to travel. Then pay attention to your growing customer base and adhere to the cut off you have established. Otherwise, every spare minute of your waking life not already taken up by your original job, will be quickly consumed by your hoof care business. Many, who intend to only trim part time, change their minds as they become established and realize the great satisfaction of improving life for so many horses. Honestly, folks...can you imagine any job that is better than playing with horses all day??



## Certification - Do You Need It?

Many people are out there providing professional hoof care services that have no formal training. Some of them are quite good, some are not. On the other hand, certification does not assure competency. I know several certified individuals, whether they be shoers or trimmers, that frighten me with their lack of skill. The advantage of certification in modern society is the stamp of credibility it puts upon you in the eyes of the equestrian community. You are more likely to be taken seriously if you are certified. In the event that —in the future —hoof care professionals end up under the thumb of some governmental agency that requires "official" certification or licensing, it is likely that already established programs will be grandfathered in, so if you are already certified, you will be that much ahead of the game.



There are a number of certification programs available to individuals who want to provide professional service in natural hoof care. Most of them are programs set up by an individual and you are certified by that individual. Personally, I feel being trained, evaluated, and certified by one person does not mean as much as being trained, evaluated and certified by a body of professionals. I think of it in terms of the college or university format. What is your diploma worth if you went through college with only one professor? Only one point of view? Only one person deciding if you graduate or not?

At the time of this writing, the field of natural hoof care is still young, so your options for certification are limited. Search for available certification programs and explore your options. Look closely at the organization and don't be afraid to ask questions before signing up. If anything doesn't seem right to you, that program is likely not a good fit for you. You will be investing a significant amount of resources in course fees, time and travel... so be certain about the program.

Personal note: Excellence comes from the individual, not the course of training. The ability to think critically and not fall into hero worship is essential to becoming a truly skilled professional, regardless of the composition of the certifying agent.

## What about the MONEY?



As part of your planning process, you certainly would like to have an idea of your potential earnings. Right? So what can you expect to earn as a Natural Hoof Care Practitioner? How much should you charge? As with anything in a free market society, what you charge is pretty much up to you, but there are some things you need to consider. If you aren't careful, you can price yourself right out of a job! A good place to start is to find out what farriers in your area charge for a trim. That will give you a base line. Generally, I suggest to people that they figure the average farrier trim fee and double it. This of course assumes you are not just a raw beginner. You should consider your skill level when deciding what to charge. If you are a beginner, should you charge as

much while you are still learning as does a seasoned professional? I would hope that personal integrity would come into play and you would not try to sell your self as a top dollar professional when you are only just getting started, although some people do things that way. Their belief is that if they pretend to have the experience, then customers will hire them so they can actually GET the experience they are pretending to have. In time, they won't be pretending any more. They believe that the more you charge, the more seriously people take you and, unfortunately, there is an element of truth in that. The bottom line, however, is that pre-

tending to know more than you actually know means a higher likelihood of mistakes, and the horse is the one who ultimately pays the price. Some practitioners believe that natural hoof care providers should charge as much as a traditional farrier charges for a set of shoes. The logic is that we provide service that enables the horse to do the same work, but barefoot. The result of the hoof care and other aspects of care about which we counsel the owner, results in less lameness, fewer vet bills and a generally healthier, happier and sounder horse. While that line of thinking is valid, trying to pull it off in the real world should prove to be challenging!

My personal views on the matter are this: Find out what farriers in your area charge. Seek out any other Natural Hoof Care practitioners in your area, or in an area with a similar economic structure, and find out what they charge. Keep your pricing in line with what people in your area are used to paying. For example: If a farrier charges \$20 for a pasture trim, then \$40 would be a reasonable amount for you to charge. If you charge too much, many horses who desperately need you will not benefit from your skills because the owners simply cannot afford excessively high prices. If you are a novice trimmer, you might consider keeping your prices lower and view those early customers as learning experiences. There is a great deal of value in that. If you are in a certification program, you can let customers know that you will be raising your prices once you become certified. All in all, you can rest assured that competent, skilled practitioners make a very good living in this business.



### Pricing Structure

Other Considerations Once you settle on how much you will charge for a basic trim, you need to establish a plan for "the rest of the story." When I say basic trim, I am referring to horses that are reasonably well behaved with reasonably normal/healthy feet and owners who are reasonably re-

sponsible. However, that is only a part, sometimes a small part, of a practitioner's total clientele. Many practitioners establish alternate pricing to address various situations. Whatever you decide your basic maintenance trim fee will be, you might add to the fee, or offer discounts depending upon the scenario.

Initial set up trims generally take longer than any other trim you will do, not so much because it takes longer with the horse, but because it is during that first visit that you will spend the most time talking about natural hoof care with all its elements, such as diet and lifestyle. To cover that extra time, you might add to your basic fee, or base your first visit on an hourly fee.

For multiple horses at the same location, you might offer a \$5 discount per horse. You can set the discount for multiple horses of one owner, or offer it to all owners at the same barn as long as the total number of horses reaches the price break number. Some practitioners will give a price break at three horses, some at five horses, and some will offer an additional break when the number of horses is ten or more at the same location. The choice is yours.

Unruly/untrained horses take up a great deal of time, not to mention they increase your injury risk. You can add more per horse, or you could add a per hour charge depending on how long it takes to get the horse done. Increasing your fees is a powerful motivator for the owner to get busy training the horse to stand quietly for you.

A personal exception on pricing difficult horses concerns rescue cases. I have a soft spot for those animals and for the people who rescue them. Even though these horses can be quite difficult to handle due to past abuses and associated pain, I usually do not charge as much for them. Part of the reason is because I respect the fact that the new owner is straining their budget to try to help the horse, and the other is a totally unreasonable feeling that I should try to make some amends for the bad behavior of my species!

If you choose to let owners call you for the next appointment rather than setting them up yourself, you will have many who wait too long and you end up doing what amounts to initial trims every time. I don't recommend this approach as it is not in the best interest of the horse, or your reputation, but if you do this, one way to "encourage" owners to call you in a timely manner is to charge more if they wait too long.

Since many of us travel great distances to help horses and owners, it is only reasonable that trip charges be part of your fee struc-



ture. It is common for practitioners to charge more outside of a certain radius from their home. Some set the radius at 50 miles some at 100 miles, or it can be any other number you select. You might choose to charge by the hour, or you might choose to charge by the mile Some tack on an additional fee per horse. Another consideration you might make is a reduced fee for payments made in cash. Regardless of how you decide to structure your fees, be sure you give it a lot of thought, remain flexible case by case, and let customers know up front what to expect.

### Equipment You Will Need

One advantage Natural Hoof Care Practitioners have over conventional farriers, is the minimal overhead. We don't have to pull heavy trailers, or load down the back of our pickup trucks with an inventory of assorted shoes, nails, forges, anvils and everything else that is needed to craft metal shoes. We could, theoretically, run our routes on a bicycle ...all we really need is rasp, nippers, chaps, hoof knife and hoof stand. That's it. \*As already discussed, you will need a dependable vehicle (even if it IS a bicycle!).



### Tools

This section is another case of stating the obvious, but you will need at least basic hoof care tools. Hoof knife, rasp and nippers are the barest minimum and not nearly enough in my estimation. Personally, in addition to knife, rasp and nippers I recommend you also have gloves, farrier chaps/apron, a hoof stand and a hoof pick. This is one case where the phrase "you get what you pay for" really does apply. Do not skimp on your tools. Quality tools that are well cared for will last a long, long time and make your job much easier — and believe me, making the job easier will become a high priority as you get busier. Go to a farrier supply store either in real space, or in cyberspace, or go to [www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com) and invest in high quality tools. Some excellent farrier supply web sites are: [www.farriersdepot.com](http://www.farriersdepot.com) [www.centaurforge.com](http://www.centaurforge.com) [www.ken-davis.com](http://www.ken-davis.com) [www.well-shod.com](http://www.well-shod.com) [www.piehtoolco.com](http://www.piehtoolco.com) There are many more.... a general search for "farrier supply" will yield many choices on the internet.



### Farrier Chaps/Apron

There are many good choices of farrier chaps (sometimes also referred to as aprons) out there in assortments of styles and materials. They range from heavy leather to reinforced canvas material. Some are quite long, coming nearly to the ankle, some are short coming barely below the knee and nearly all have pads or reinforcements over the top and inner thigh areas. Whatever type you choose amounts to personal preference, but I personally opt for maximum flexibility. To my thinking, thick leather and thick thigh pads are not necessary. Such pads are meant to protect farriers from the nails they hammer into hooves when applying the shoes. We do not apply shoes - we remove them. I have found that chaps made from thinner very flexible leather suit me better, especially since I often find myself crouching low to the ground trimming horses who cannot lift their feet, or crawling around on the ground to trim horses who are prostrate from the severe pain of founder Thinner, flexible leather or fabric is less cumbersome for those cases.





### Hoof Knife

Many horse owners have an old somewhat rusty hoof knife lying around their barn somewhere, or they run to the local feed and farm supply store and pick up a six-dollar hoof knife to begin their trimming career. Invest in a well-made knife with a high quality steel blade. Otherwise, you will wear yourself out hacking away at a hoof with a forever dull knife that needs constant sharpening because it simply cannot hold an edge. There are a variety of hoof knives on the market. Some have flat blades, some curved. Some have long blades, some short. Some have thick blades, some thin. Some have blades that are single edged, and some are double edged. Most people prefer whichever style of knife they first learned to use. Style does not matter.... quality does!



### Knife Sharpener

There are several types of sharpeners available specifically for sharpening hoof knives. Which sharpener you choose to use — as with everything else — is up to you. The most important thing about a knife sharpener, no matter which type you choose, is the ability to use it. If you cannot find someone to show you how to sharpen your knives, there is a section on this page [www.barefoothorse.com/barefoot Tools.html](http://www.barefoothorse.com/barefoot%20Tools.html) to get you started, then practice.

### Nippers



For someone who is trimming their own horses and is diligent about keeping up with a regular trim schedule, nippers should not be needed past the initial set-up trim. However, since you are planning to enter a career in hoof care, nippers will be the difference between efficiency and exhaustion. Quality nippers will cost (at the time of this writing) between \$80 and \$150. I personally prefer the GE brand of nippers. I find them to be well made and well balanced. I also prefer them because of the design of the upper part of the handles just below the nipper head that allows for the addition of a nipper spring. I have found the nipper spring to be an invaluable asset on many horses that — because of their condition — require that I hold the hoof with one hand while I trim with the other, rather than putting the leg between my legs which frees up both hands. The spring eliminates the contortion of fingers needed to open and close the nipper handles with only one hand. Some trimmers do very well without the spring; I find it much easier with one.

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## Rasp

Rasping can be the single most exhausting part of trimming. A sharp rasp is essential. Most of us go through rasps at a staggering rate simply because a dull rasp means you expend more energy to get the job done. At the end of a long day, your energy reserves are tapped. As soon as my rasp STARTS to dull, its out of there!! This means you will need to carry a supply of extra rasps with you so a fresh, sharp rasp is always at the ready! The good news is that rasps are cheaper if you buy in volume, so I suggest you plan to buy them by the case (usually they are sold 12 to a case). Another good thing is that there are services available to have your rasps sharpened — extending the life of your rasps. Your local farrier supply store may offer sharpening services. If not, the manufacturers of the brand of rasp that I use, Save-Edge, offer such a service. File Sharpening Company, Inc. 360 West Church Street Xenia, OH 45385 Ph: (937) 376-8268



## Rasp Handles



Personal preference dictates the type of rasp handles people choose. The important thing is that you use a handle, regardless of the type. One reason is that the pointed metal tine of the rasp, where the handle is supposed to go, can be quite dangerous to both you and the horse. Keep in mind that not all horses

are going to stand quietly for trimming. Additionally, comfortable handle will reduce stress to your hands which means you will be less tired at the end of the day —always a plus! The most common handle is a wooden one. The wooden handle screws onto the tine, it is light weight and smooth, but it does not go on far enough to cover the entire tine. This means that it ends up adding length to the rasp — something you don't need when working on ponies, minis or anything else that is low to the ground. I personally prefer the Equithotics rasp handle available at [www.equithotics.com/handles.html](http://www.equithotics.com/handles.html) . They are plastic, and have a bit of flexibility to them, like rubber. They absorb the vibrations from the rasp, particularly on dry hooves, and they cover the entire tine of the rasp. They are lightweight and very comfortable in the hand.



## Hoof Stand?

There is a bit of a debate among some practitioners about whether or not to use a hoof stand. Most trimmers choose to use a hoof stand, but some choose to forego one. So let's explore the issue:



### Trimming without a hoof stand:

Not having to lug a stand around lightens your load considerably and makes it that much easier to go trimming on that bicycle I mentioned earlier! You DO know I was kidding about the bicycle, right?? Some horses will pull their feet when placed on the stand, knocking it over, spilling your tools and sometimes creating a hazard for the horse and for you, especially if the horse is particularly fractious and you need to jump out of the way quickly. ☹️ Back or knees, which hurts more? If you do not use a hoof stand, you will have to hold up the foot yourself, usually resting it on your knee. If you are physically fit and flexible, this is not a problem. However, it does create the possibility that the horse will put its weight on your knee and personally I like my knees to bend in the direction they do now! Holding the foot without a stand can add stress to your back if you are not very precise and flexible with your body positioning.



Trimming without a stand does give you more freedom of movement when handling an uneasy horse as you don't have to worry about the position of the stand and constantly moving it about if the horse won't stand still. It also enables you to trim on very uneven surfaces such as out in a hilly pasture.

### Trimming with a hoof stand:

Using a hoof stand allows you to keep your tools all in one place, off the ground. This will keep them cleaner and less prone to rust. If tools are laying on the ground, the horse can step on them causing damage to the tools and possibly to the horse. ☹️ Using a hoof stand allows the horse to put his weight on the stand rather than on your knee. This will conserve your strength and make it less likely you will have wear and tear issues with your back and knees long-term. ☹️ Using a hoof stand with a cradle attachment allows you to more easily trim fronts and hinds. This is particularly attractive when working on large warm bloods and drafts. While many horses are cooperative and don't pull their feet, it can be just as stressful with the horse who picks up his feet but is happy for you to hold them for him! That dead weight, especially with a draft, will suck the fun right out of your day! Letting a hoof stand cradle hold that lazy boy's leg will put the fun right back in! Many stands have a tri-pod base consisting of three legs; should you opt to use a hoof stand, I recommend that you choose one with a disc shaped base. In my experience, the tri-pod base is less stable and offers only three places (the three legs) to put your feet to stabilize the stand when a horse's foot is on it. The ability to steady the stand with your feet is critical with horses that are not dead calm with their foot up there. Additionally, if the horse does tip the stand over, a narrow metal leg sticking up in the air poses an increased danger to both you and the horse.



A popular stand with many Natural Hoof Care Practitioners is the HoofJack. This is also an excellent choice for a high quality, lightweight stand. The hoof support and the cradle support are two separate pillars that interchange. The picture shows both as two complete stands for illustration purposes, but there is only one base. The base is wide and constructed entirely of plastic making it lightweight and safe should it tip over. It also comes in a version just for minis and a version for drafts.



## Other Tools

Since the focus of your business is to take horses OUT of shoes, you will no doubt need some tools to help you pull them off.

**Pulloffs** At the top of the list are shoe pullers or "pulloffs." The one to the left is high quality and high priced. The one to the right is much cheaper. Note the difference in the design of the heads. I have found that the one on the left is not as effective for me because the rounder shape to the head provides less leverage than does the wider, more oval shape of the head on the one to the right. Again, it's a matter of preference and

## Crease Nail Pullers

Another very helpful tool for taking off shoes, particularly for the novice practitioner, is a crease nail puller. The head is designed to fit into the crease of the shoe (the groove with the nail holes in it) and grab the nail head for pulling the nail out. I encourage anyone who is not able to pull off a shoe with three quick strokes of the pulloffs, to invest in one of these. Here's why: When you pull off a shoe, the nails are still attached to it. Many horses will struggle when you are pulling the shoe, some will forcibly pull their foot away. A skilled professional knows how to quickly get the shoe off in a matter of seconds and hang on to the foot in the process. However, the danger is in the person with less experience trying a direct pull off and the horse pulls his foot away with the shoe pulled only half way off, nails exposed. Imagine that scenario and the horse slams his foot down on the ground. You now have 2 or 3 nails imbedded in the horse's sole. Your good intentions have resulted in an injured horse, a vet call, and a very unhappy owner. With the crease nail puller you can pull out the nails one at a time, leaving the shoe against the foot. If the horse pulls his foot away and puts it down with you using this method, all that happens is the nail bends over, posing no threat of injury to the foot. I highly recommend this method for all new practitioners, and anyone trying to take shoes off a horse in pain that cannot hold its foot up for very long.



## Clinch Cutter

Shoes will certainly come off easier if you remove the clinches. The easiest way is to rasp them off and that will mean keeping a few old rasps in your truck, you certainly do not want to ruin a new one by rasping clinches. You must also be careful not to rasp the hoof wall too much while you are trying to remove the clinches, it takes practice. A clinch cutter will lift up and, if you are good at it, neatly shear off the clinches. Of course, you will need a hammer to use the clinch cutter, as well as some guidance on how to apply it.

## Halter and Lead Rope

Now this might seem odd, but there will be times — many times — that having a halter and lead rope with you will save you time and frustration. As your business builds, there will be occasions when no one is around when you come to trim the horses. Having a halter and lead rope with you will save you from having to hunt around their barn for one, or worse yet, finding that the owner forgot to unlock the tack room and didn't leave a halter out for you and there is no halter available at all. I carry two rope halters with me. One is horse sized and can be adjusted down for a pony, the other is draft sized and will accommodate even the 18 hand Shire stallions that I trim.



## Other Inventory

### Boots

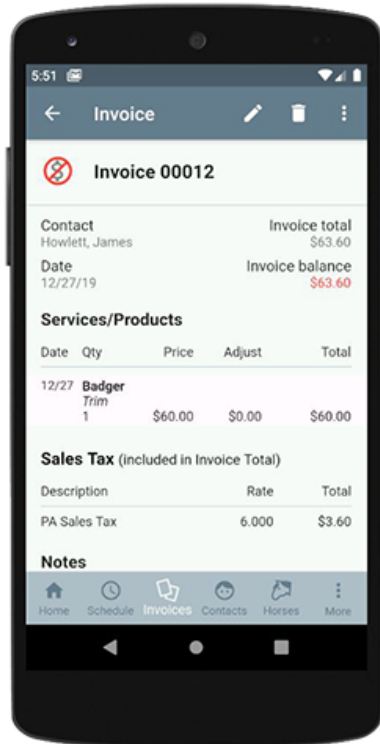
One of the most important parts of introducing horse owners to natural hoof care is helping them to understand that many horses coming out of shoes will need a transition period before their hooves are tough enough to do their regular jobs barefoot. Many horses suffering hoof pathology will need boots to give them comfort and keep



them up and moving during their healing. To help those horses, you will need to discuss the use of hoof boots with the owner. With the variety of hoof boots available today, you need to decide if you will carry an inventory of boots along with you, or simply make a recommendation to the owner and send them off to the internet to order boots themselves. If you decide to become a dealer of hoof boots, you will be able to make a little money from each sale, but you will also need to carry at least a minimal inventory.

### Books

In addition to having an inventory of boots available to your customers, you might choose to carry a supply of the books you will likely recommend that your customers read. Key to a good working relationship is the customer's understanding of what you do and why it is different from every other hoof care professional — namely traditional farriers. That understanding comes through education, and the more your customer is educated, the easier your job becomes...and we like "easier," right?? If you wish to become a book dealer, contact [www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com) for distributor pricing. Some of the best books on natural hoof care are available at Star Ridge.



### Cell Phone

Your cell phone will be one of your most important tools. If you do not have one, I strongly urge you to get one — as soon as possible. As a hoof care professional, you will be spending a great deal of time on the road and your business is dependant upon communication and dependability. Customers need to be able to reach you and you need to be able to reach them if you are running late, or need to make a last minute schedule adjustment from the road. In addition, if you have a family, they need to be able to reach you as well. Make sure your cell phone plan has plenty of anytime/anywhere minutes. You will find yourself on the phone probably far more than you ever wanted to be! Calls will come in day and night and even while you are on another call! Whether you call out, or someone calls in, you get charged for the minutes, so the more minutes included in your plan, the better. Extra minutes over your plan allowance can run up your monthly bill at an alarming rate! Hands-free thingy? One of the fastest growing categories of automobile accident causes is people talking on their cell phones. I am as guilty as anyone of trying to juggle the phone, the steering wheel, and even writing a note all at the same time while careening down the highway! I have since mended my ways after a few close calls with other cars. Please...please...invest in a hands free car kit if you must use the phone while driving. Better yet, make sure you have voicemail set up on your phone and let it catch incoming calls if you are driving. The caller can leave you a message and you can return the call when you stop. Most calls do not require an instant response, so letting voice mail handle it is not only safer while driving, but it allows you to determine the

situation of each caller and triage calls later in the day when you have time. No call is so urgent that it is worth risking your life, or the lives of others on the road. A split second of inattention is all it takes to get into a potentially fatal accident.





## Computer

You DO have a computer, don't you???! Right about now, you are probably saying, "Duh, I'm reading this aren't I?" Well, yes, but my point here is the benefits of using it in your business. One very good reason for using a computer is one that can make life as a hoof care practitioner much easier.

Email! While some practitioners prefer all contacts to be by phone, personally, I do not like having the phone become a permanent attachment to my face. Calls can last for HOURS with some people. As soon as possible, I move routine customer contacts to email rather than phone. In this way, I can send out reminders of upcoming appointments, send information on

specific issues via email attachments or web site links, receive data updates from a customer on a difficult case, saving me from having to write volumes during a visit and, perhaps more importantly, have a written record of what has been said — very handy if you ever get into a "he said, she said" dispute, or misunderstanding! Another benefit of using a computer is getting directions by email. In this way, I just print them out and go, or I verify the location with an online mapping web site such as [www.Mapquest.com](http://www.Mapquest.com) because not everyone is good at giving directions. I have had people tell me to turn left when it should have been right and wasted a lot of time backtracking. You can also make your office work easier to manage with any of the many software packages available to help you with such things as bookkeeping, scheduling, tax preparation, inventory tracking and many other of the mundane chores that take you away from the fun part of your job, working with the horses. Perhaps the most compelling reason to have a computer is the ability to read and research online. It is important that you stay current on hoof care issues and information and continuously strive to broaden your knowledge base. The computer is a vital tool allowing you access to the largest library in the world...the internet.

## Getting Organized

Being organized can make or break you in this, or any service-based business. It is important that you show up where and when you say you will, and staying organized is the only way to avoid missing appointments. It does not have to be complicated. In fact the less complicated you make things, the less things there are to go wrong. For long-term success, you must enjoy your work. Most practitioners' LEAST favorite part of doing business is the paperwork. It can quickly overwhelm you, especially if it is cumbersome and complicated, but it is a critical part of your business. Keep it simple!



## "Office" Space

As a hoof care provider, your business is mobile. Driving from customer to customer is the nature of the business. For the most part your truck, or car, will be your office and it can become cluttered and unmanageable faster than you can imagine. As you go from customer to customer you will need to carry along your invoices and your appointment book at a minimum. It is also a good idea to carry an additional supply of business cards and brochures if you have them, and if you don't — get them.

You never know when you will meet prospective customers

and have an opportunity to expand your customer base, so it's always a good idea to be prepared to hand out information about you and your business. An ordinary planner, or date book, available from any office supply store will work just fine to keep your appointments. I prefer the type that shows the entire month on facing pages. If you also plan to carry a supply of books, or other informational material, you will need to organize and manage your inventory. In the case of books, it is important to protect them from damage they might receive if they are flying about the interior of your car or truck as you whip around curves, or up and down hills, on your way to your next job. A book purchased from you should be delivered in the same excellent condition it



would be if purchased directly from the publisher. Generally customers will understand if a book purchased from you is not pristine, but it's a matter of integrity and professionalism to take extra care to maintain them in good condition. If you travel great distances — which most of us must do to reach and help the horses that need us — then you will also need to carry maps, or an atlas. I serve customers not only in my home state of Georgia, but also in surrounding states — Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina and sometimes, Tennessee — maps are a must for me. It is easy to see how your vehicle can be come out of control with "stuff." The easiest method to control the business supplies you must carry along would be to purchase an inexpensive plastic container from Wal-Mart. It should be just big enough to contain a small supply of invoices, your appointment book, a supply of business cards and brochures — even your maps. The plastic containers that are the size of shoeboxes work well. Another, larger plastic container can be used to house the book inventory you have for sale. Books should fit snugly inside to avoid too much damaging movement as you drive. However you choose to organize item inside your vehicle is up to you. It depends largely on what type of vehicle you have and its storage options. In addition to your vehicle being your mobile office, you will need to designate a space at home for your business. A small desk with a small filing drawer or cabinet or inexpensive cardboard file storage boxes are the minimum. Home office space may be deductible on your income tax return, so don't forget to check with your CPA about home office eligibility.

### Managing the paperwork

Setting up a filing structure in your home office should be done before you get out there on the road. Do not make the mistake of thinking you will "keep it in a pile and sort it out later." Your business can (and hopefully will!) get hectic faster than you think, and it will be difficult to try and get organized after the fact. You do not want to spend precious evening hours sorting through stacks of receipts, invoices, and bank records. Trust me...sleep will become a precious commodity, and so will time with your family. Do yourself a favor and plan now so you can spend more time with your spouse, children, and your own animals! Get in the habit of keeping track of all receipts related to your hoof care business in a file, or drawer separate from your personal business. Consult your CPA to determine what types of expenses will be deductible, and then structure your filing system accordingly. There is no such thing as being too organized!



### Invoices

FREE YOUR LOGO		COMPANY NAME	
1st Main Street Sunny, FL 33436 123-456-7789			
NAME:	ADDRESS:		
PHONE:      DATE:			
SOLD BY:   CASH   CHECK   CREDIT   C.O.D.   ON ACCOUNT   PREPAID   PAYMENT			
QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	AMOUNT
Received by:		TAX:	
		TOTAL:	
No. <b>0001</b> Thank You      All claims and returned goods must be accompanied by this tag.			

While the business of helping horses is vastly rewarding in and of itself, you actually work for money, not just for fun! Invoicing is your one key document toward making a living. Many practitioners design their own invoices and print them themselves with their computer, have them commercially printed, or they use standard generic invoices such as the type you can purchase at office supply stores. At each appointment, you should always prepare your invoices in duplicate, either by having a printing office prepare your invoices in a self-carboning format, or by putting a piece of carbon paper between two invoices. The latter is admittedly "low tech" but it is an inexpensive option when you are getting started and printing up your own invoices. Keeping a copy will help you remember what happened and what you told the customer at the last visit. As you get busier, this "memory aide" will become more and more important. Also, if you are ever audited, you may be required to produce copies of your invoices, or some states may require you to turn them in with your annual tax return. Check with your CPA about the tax codes in your area.

## Bookkeeping - Payments Due

While this might seem like a no-brainer, keeping track of payments will be important. Generally speaking, in this business, whether a shoer or a trimmer, payment is expected upon completion of the job. But in reality, there will be times when a customer can't be at the barn when you come and forgets to leave a check, or they forget their checkbook, or they thought they had enough cash with them but don't, or you needed to provide some extra service and they didn't know how much to write the check for (this would be for an absent customer leaving a check for you). Set up a system now to keep track of payments due. It is far easier than you think to forget who owes you what if you do not make a note of it right away. You might wish to keep an account ledger with you, but this means keeping track of another "thing" in your vehicle. I prefer to just jot it down in my appointment book on the spot, and then transfer it to a bookkeeping ledger (on my computer) when I get back to my home office.

## Travel Expenses

One of the most important records you need to keep is mileage. Since tax deductions for mileage can make or break you at tax time, it is important that you get in the habit of keeping track. One inexpensive way to do this is to purchase an Auto Mileage Log & Expense Record, available from Dome Publishing Company. It will cost you about \$5 and is available at most business supply retailers such as Office Depot. It is a small log book — only 3 1/2 " x 1/2 " x 6 1/2" and 140 Pages with pockets on the inside of each cover flap to stash gas and other receipts that you collect during the day. It also allows for logging vehicle repair and maintenance expenses. Because of its small size, it is easy to carry about and stash out of the way in your vehicle, but because of its small size, it is easy to ignore!

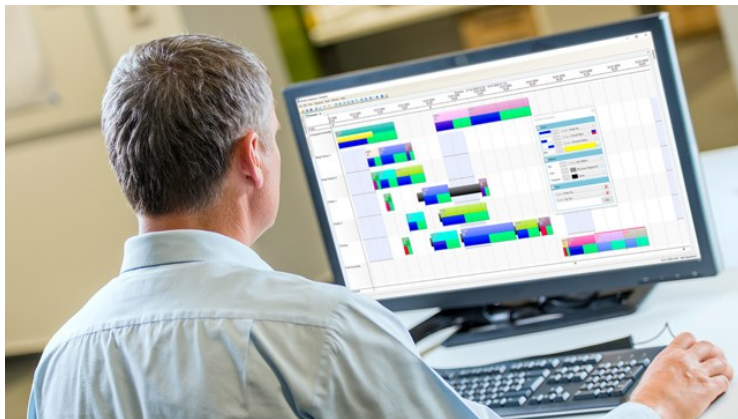
The hard part is training yourself to log in your mileage before you leave in the morning and again when you return. Remember, only miles accumulated for business purposes are legal, not trips to the grocery store! Some people prefer to use palm pilots to help manage their business. If you have one or plan to get one, there are some downloadable software options specifically for keeping track of mileage and business expenses. One example is a software package called Automated Express <http://www.automated-auto-log.com/>. There are many others, so do some research to find one that best suits your needs.



## Scheduling

Without a doubt, this will be one of the biggest trials in your business. No matter how well you plan and prepare, no matter how fancy your scheduling system is, you will still find that managing your schedule is a constant challenge. If you are just working your immediate neighborhood, your daily schedule will be fairly easy to set up and adjust. However, many practitioners travel significant distances from their homes...there simply are not enough of us...yet! Because of that, maintaining a schedule that is time and travel efficient is essential. Your schedule will become the lifeline to your business - carry it with you everywhere you go.

The simplest format to use would be a monthly pocket planner available from any office supply retailer. This will give you a quick view of who you have scheduled on what day and allow you to plan months in advance in a low profile easy to carry booklet. Many also include an address section where you can keep contact information on your customers easily at hand. If you are an electronics junkie and prefer to carry a palm pilot, there are scheduling options standard on most of them. Regardless of your preferred media, the basic mandate is to keep it with you...everywhere you go!



## Forms and Other Documents

How many forms you use in your business practice depends on you. The basic "must have" documents are your schedule, your invoice, and your mileage/expense log. Many practitioners have created forms for various reasons, usually in an effort to keep track of people, horses and what is going on with whom, when and where, as well as to make sure information they present to customers is retained. Didn't I tell you organization is going to be important? None of these additional forms are essential, but you might find the ideas useful:

### Phone Contact Form

This can be useful to keep by the home phone. The purpose of making a "form" for this is to make sure you get all the information you want in the initial call. Some callers can quickly get off track, sidetracking you as well. A quick scan of the form will help you make sure you have asked all of your questions before you hang up. This form can also be useful for other family members who might catch one of your calls while you are out, it will list all the questions that should be asked. Having this form handy will help assure that, should your teenager answer the phone while you are out, you will get all the information that you need from the caller.

### Instruction Sheets

These are usually one page documents that many of us create to help owners remember instructions we have given during the visit. Generally these documents are given to new customers who may not yet have all the basics "down" on natural horse care - what to do (and what not to do). Having pre-printed the information will save you from having to write it over and over at each stop. Additionally, many practitioners have an instruction sheet specifically for foundered horses. Such a form is particularly useful in these cases since the owner (and the situation) is generally emotionally charged and less likely to remember what you recommend for care than the owner with the average horse just coming out of shoes.

### Initial Consultation Form

Some practitioners have prepared an initial consultation form for completion on the first visit with a horse, particularly a horse with significant issues. This form could be the beginning of a case study, or serve to help you (and the owner) remember how the horse was when you started care. This is a form that you can create yourself, customizing it to your needs. It should have space for the owner's name and contact information, the horse's name, breed, gender, health history, hoof care history, diet, lifestyle ... anything and everything you can think of to ask initially. It should also contain a section for notes on your initial findings and what your plan of care will be. You might also attach photos of the first visit — this can be particularly helpful to remind both you and the owner of how far the horse has come.

## Advertising

This is going to be an obvious statement, but spreading the word about what you do is critical to building your business. How fast you want your business to grow depends on you. Many people who are just getting started prefer to quietly ease into the business while continuing their existing jobs and gaining confidence in their trimming skills. Others jump into it with abandon...quitting their jobs, taking out an advertisement in the local paper, putting up a website and hitting the road. The pace at which and manner in which you choose to start and grow your business is entirely up to you. It is in your best interest, as well as the best interest of your customers, to operate with honesty and integrity. I would hope that you would not represent yourself as having more experience than you actually do. Customers will respect you more if you are honest with them. Your business will prosper only if you have a good reputation, and being honest is the key.

## Word of Mouth

Word of mouth can be the most powerful means of gaining customers. It may be your most effective advertising. In the beginning there will be few people talking, but as your customer base grows there will be more and more mouths spreading the word about you. It can be like dropping a pebble in a pond. A few people recommend you, and then those people recommend you, and so on. It grows exponentially and can net you a full schedule in no time. Word of mouth advertising is beneficial for both you and for the customer. In this world of so many choices, it is easier for the new customer to choose you because they have the recommendation of someone with firsthand experience with you. The benefit for you is that you don't have to spend time convincing them to be a



customer; the person who referred them has already done that for you! Always keep in mind: a dissatisfied customer will tend to tell MANY more people than a satisfied one will.

## Brochures and Business Cards

Every professional has business cards, so should you. Business cards help people remember your name and contact information. A well-crafted business card attracts attention and can provide a good first impression. Don't be shy about handing them out. Always give a new customer a business card and suggest they keep it with them, so they can reach you if they have questions, or concerns about their horse. Additionally, encouraging them to carry your card means they will have all your information handy when they are talking with their friends who might also be interested in your services. I will often give out two of my business cards, one is the usual paper card, the other is a magnetic card for the customer to put on their refrigerator. People often lose paper cards, but the magnetic card will assure they have your contact information. If you are fairly savvy on a computer, you can generate your own cards and print them on high quality card stock designed for home printing. You can even purchase magnetic card stock that goes into your desktop printer should you choose to "do it yourself" with that version of your business card. If you prefer to have cards professionally printed for you, the web site below offers an assortment of business supplies for farriers. Some of the clip art options are perfect for the "barefoot" provider in such that they do not depict forges or shoes. [www.hoofprints.com/business.cards.html](http://www.hoofprints.com/business.cards.html) I have found brochures to be a real time saver when I'm on the road. It is quite common for someone to notice the signs on my truck as I pull into a convenience store and ask, "So, what is Natural Hoof Care?" This simple question can lead to a lengthy conversation. If I am on the road serving customers, I will be late to my next barn, yet I don't want to turn away a potential new customer, or an opportunity to enlighten someone. Having an eye-catching, informative brochure provides a great deal more information about what you do, and who you are, than a business card alone. Handing someone a brochure not only provides them with basic information about Natural Hoof Care, it allows them the opportunity to think about it, perhaps to research it, and make an informed decision to call you. I believe this also cuts down on unproductive conversation, or even arguments from folks who only wish to challenge the "notion" of taking horses barefoot.

## Your Vehicle

Your car or truck can be a powerful marketing tool. Putting information on your vehicle with magnetic signs or vinyl lettering effectively turns it into a rolling billboard, advertising your service everywhere you go. You can do this yourself or have it professionally done. There are web sites that allow you to design custom lettering right on a graphic of your make and model vehicle. In this way you can be sure it fits the space properly. The site I have used is <http://www.speedysigns.com/> They provide fast, quality service as



well as instructions on how to apply signage to the vehicle yourself. They also will make custom magnetic signs if you choose that method. A word of caution about magnetic signs: they will damage the vehicle's finish underneath the sign over time. If you decide to turn your vehicle into a rolling billboard, be sure to check with your insurance company. Signage designates your vehicle as a business vehicle rather than personal use vehicle and may require a different coverage.



## Local Newspaper

Even the smallest of towns has a local newspaper which is an inexpensive source of advertising in your area. If you are just getting started, this may be a good option for you to get your name "out there." Ads can be either a powerful tool to bring you business, or they can be a colossal waste of money. It all depends on how you write the ad. Someone once said, "The only thing worse than reading a newspaper ad, is writing one." Most newspaper ads fail because readers are reading the paper for news, not ads, and most ads are boring. Chances are, readers will not be looking in the ads sections for a "Natural Hoof Care Provider," but they might very well be interested in your service if they knew what it was. Your ad needs to "look" like a story with a powerful attention getting, benefit driven headline. I advise you to do some research on how to write a newspaper ad before you happily hand over your ad AND your money to the publishers.

## Phone Book

Your business phone will most likely be your existing home phone and/or your cell phone. If you only wish to use one phone number, it should be your cell phone since the nature of your business is mobile. However, if you also publish your home phone, or add a business line to your home, you can take advantage of advertising in the phone book.

The "Yellow Pages" can be a great option because it is the first place people look when they are not certain who to call for a particular service. Be aware, though, that many (if not all) phone book sales reps will push you to buy a bigger ad than you need, committing you to a years worth of monthly payments. It would be wise to talk with other, non-competing advertisers in your area to see how their "Yellow Pages" ads are working for their business. Then, if you decide to buy an ad, stick to your guns and do not let the rep talk you into a bigger ad than you need, or can afford. Depending upon where you live, your local "Yellow Pages" may already have a section for Farriers. I doubt if any municipality has a section for "Natural Hoof Care"...not yet anyway. Check with the company that handles advertising listings in the "Yellow Pages." In many cases a simple text listing under an existing category is free. Some companies will actually create a category for you if you request it. Do be careful if you decide to go with "Yellow Pages" advertising. It is very easy to get talked into more of an ad than you intended and you are stuck paying for it the entire year.

## Web Sites

Good sources of advertising for many practitioners are the existing web sites promoting natural hoof care. Some of them list practitioners by region, state and even by country, and they do it as a service to horse owners with no cost to you. These sites already have a high ranking in the search engines and have been widely published in print. You might also decide to develop your own web site. If you are fairly functional on the computer, there are many places on the internet that will help you develop and publish your personal web site. A quick search on the internet for "Natural Hoof Care" will return a long list of web sites others have put up. You should explore them for ideas on how you might best present yourself on the web.

## Equine Publications (magazines)

As the "Natural Movement" continues to grow, equine publications are presenting information geared toward the segment of the horse owning population that would be interested in your services. Some of these magazines are in both print and electronic format and can be a good source of advertising. Be advised, however, that magazine advertising can be very expensive and not necessarily effective for you in your little niche of the world's geography

Currently, the leading magazine for holistic minded horse owners is appropriately named "Natural Horse Magazine." You can obtain information by visiting their web site at [www.naturalhorse.com](http://www.naturalhorse.com). You can also contact any of the major print equestrian magazines for information on placing ads. However, as mentioned, it will be very expensive and it is likely that you will be able to build your business quite nicely without any need for this type of advertising. If you decide to go for magazine advertising, the same recommendations apply as for advertising in newspapers. Your ad needs to be well written or you are wasting money, and in this case, lots of money!

## Veterinarians

Veterinarians can be your best source for new business. As a matter of practice it is in the best interest of the horse for you to develop a rapport with a veterinarian who is supportive of your efforts. If the vet is happy with your work, you will be a source for referral of his or her clients who are in need of hoof care. This is not only a powerful endorsement of your skill, but it is also the

best form of free, word-of-mouth advertising you can get.

### Other Sources of Advertising

Additional possibilities for advertising your business that are specific to this field are tack shops, feed stores, and local riding clubs. Most businesses that cater to the equestrian community will permit you to leave your business card, perhaps even some of your brochures. Many feed and tack stores have bulletin boards, or some specified location where customers can freely post notices of such things as horses or tack for sale, notices of stallions standing at stud, boarding facilities with available space, and so on. Usually you can tack up one of your cards there. However, don't hesitate to talk to the clerk or owner of the store and ask if there is a more prominent place for you to advertise, such as on the checkout counter! Additionally, check with your local riding clubs and any other equestrian organizations and inquire about ad space in their newsletter or about a location for notices at their show grounds. You may end up getting booked to do a talk at their next club meeting.

### From the Call to Completing the Job

So, now you are all set up and ready to go and that first call comes in from a prospective customer. As the saying goes, first impressions are the most powerful and lasting, so make it a good one.

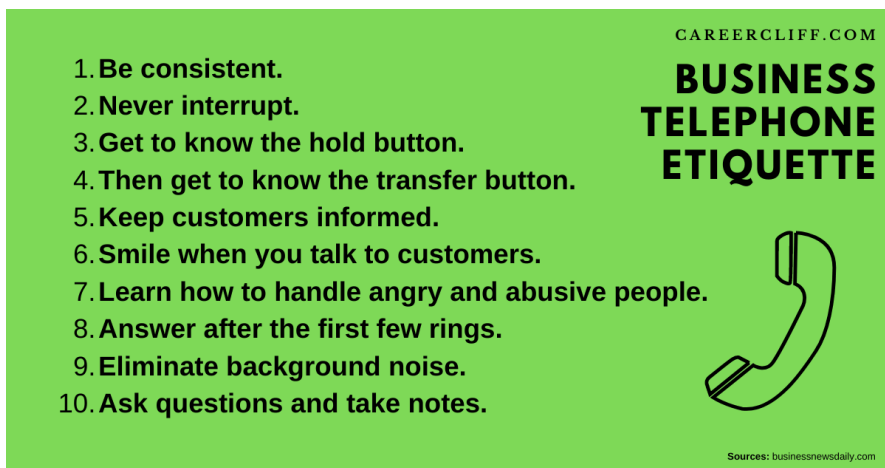
You will need to have an answering machine or voice mail on every phone line you choose to publish as a contact for your business. Your recorded greeting should be clear and succinct, letting the caller know that their call is important to you and that you will return their call promptly.

Some callers will not speak clearly, have their thoughts organized, or may have a heavy accent. To save yourself frustration from garbled messages you might ask callers to leave their name, phone number and a detailed message. That may sound obvious, but believe me, not all callers will leave enough information unless you ask for it. I have actually had people call me and not leave a phone number. I worry to this day about some of them, wondering if they thought I just didn't care. In addition, if you want to steer people toward email, ask them to also leave their email address.

If you are not on hand to catch the call, be certain to return the call promptly, the same day if possible, by the next day certainly. If you choose to use a phone contact form, keep a stack by the phone and in your vehicle so you can take notes during the call. "Duh Alert": if you are in your vehicle, pull over before taking the call, or as we have already discussed, let voicemail catch the call and return the call when you are stopped. During the call, be prepared to answer all the caller's questions. This is also a good time to gather initial information about the situation you may be entering into, such as: how many horses they have, how long it's been since last hoof care, if they are already barefoot, or still shod, how familiar the owner is with what you do versus what a "regular" farrier does, if the horses have any physical, or behavioral issues, etc. The answers to these questions will be helpful in many ways, not the least of which is how much time you should allow for the visit. For example, if the caller has horses that are shod and not happy about farriers, you will need to allow more time in the schedule for this visit than for well-mannered horses already barefoot and just needing a 6 week touch up trim. Additionally, be sure to get as many phone numbers as are pertinent - the customer's home phone, cell phone, barn phone, or barn manager's cell phone if the horse is boarded. This will come in handy if you get lost, or are running late.

Make sure you tell the caller what your fees are up front, including any possible trip charges. Chances are that you charge more than a traditional farrier does for "just a trim." The customer needs to have an idea of what they will be expected to pay, and if you prefer payment in cash over checks let them know that up front as well.

As a matter of course, you should allow at least an hour for any initial visit with a new customer, especially if they are new to natural hoof care, as there will be many questions and much discussion in the beginning. Extra time spent during the first visit will be



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**BUSINESS TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE**

1. **Be consistent.**
2. **Never interrupt.**
3. **Get to know the hold button.**
4. **Then get to know the transfer button.**
5. **Keep customers informed.**
6. **Smile when you talk to customers.**
7. **Learn how to handle angry and abusive people.**
8. **Answer after the first few rings.**
9. **Eliminate background noise.**
10. **Ask questions and take notes.**

Sources: businessnewsdaily.com



well spent and will go a long way toward building a solid relationship as well as your good reputation as a caring, helpful provider.

Next, you will need to determine how soon these horses need to see you based upon how long it has been since their last visit with a farrier or other hoof care provider, and/or based on lameness that may need immediate attention. Once you have determined the time frame in which you need to visit these new horses, you can do one of two things while you have the new customer on the phone. You can either pull out your schedule book (the one you always have with you — remember?) and give them a date right then, or you can tell them you will need to consult your schedule to see where you can work them in and you will call, or email them (whichever they prefer) promptly with a date and approximate time. One note about setting times...I tell my customers that the time I give them is approximate because I never know if a horse at a stop ahead of them will need extra attention and if so, I do not rush the horse, giving it the attention that it needs. This sends a clear message to your new customer that you will also give them the same consideration, if need be, and not be short tempered, or rushed with their horse. They will appreciate that consideration and it reinforces your caring attitude.

If this new customer does not require immediate care, look over your schedule and see where they will best fit in along with others in the same general vicinity, or along the same, or a workable route. You can line up appointments with the farthest one first then work your way back toward home, or you can do the reverse. In some routes, it may work out in a more circular layout such that you head out east, go south, then west and back around to home, or some similar configuration.

It is important to be on time (or as close as possible). This is your first opportunity to show that you are reliable and to make a good impression. If, while you are en route, it becomes apparent that you will be more than thirty minutes later than you had estimated, call whomever is going to meet you with the horse and let them know. Try to make that call before your scheduled time, not when you are 30 minutes late! Many times owners will have to leave work to meet you, so it is just simple courtesy to let them know if you are running late.

When you arrive at the barn, step out of your vehicle with a smile...remember first impressions are powerful. Be friendly to everyone you meet ... even if it is a scowling farrier who is wondering who the heck you are and why you are in his domain Many farriers have a negative impression of "barefooters"... unfortunately, their opinions are justified in some cases...don't perpetuate it. Offer a friendly greeting and move on to your customer.

Take some time to greet your new customer and meet their horses. Let the owner show you around the barn. Believe me, this will prove valuable in many ways later on. If, on future visits, your customer is not able to be there, you will need to find the horses you are to trim. Make sure the owner or barn manager shows you where that horse is typically housed. If it is a boarding facility, take a minute to familiarize yourself with any barn rules that might affect you. Inadvertently stepping on toes at a boarding facility is not going to win you favor among the barn gossips. Oh you'll get air time, but it won't be good!!!

Once you have met the customer and the horses, ask if there are any questions before you begin. This will give you the chance to clear any confusion the new customer may have about what you do, especially if they are a bit nervous about the whole "idea" of natural hoof care. Explain what you will be doing before you start, explain what you are doing as you do it, and then explain what you did after you are finished. Customers will really appreciate your willingness to explain things, teach them, and answer all their questions. If you take the time to do this during the first visit, you won't have to do this at subsequent trims and you have gone a long way toward laying the foundation for trust.

Once the job is complete, excuse yourself and go write out the invoice. It is best to discourage the customer from following you to the truck by saying, "Excuse me for a moment, I'll be right back." I mention this because often the customer will follow you to the truck and will be talking to you the whole time you are trying to write the bill. I have sections on my invoices where I can make notes about the horse and what I would like the customer to do between my visits. It is easy to get distracted and forget to write something important.

Before I leave a barn, I have already set the next appointment date. This gives the customer plenty of time to plan and gives me a long range forecast of the schedule. Some practitioners prefer to arrange the next appointment later and call the customer a week or so ahead of time. Some prefer to let the customer call when the horse is due. I find the last option the least acceptable because it is important that the horses be kept on a regular routine. People get busy and time slips by...if I set the schedule for them they know their horses will be kept on a regular schedule and its one less thing for them to worry about. Most owners really appreciate that.

Note: Probably the most compelling reason to keep horses on a regular schedule rather than letting the owner call you is this:

*Horses that are infrequently trimmed will not have healthy, good-looking feet. People will see that and might ask who the owner's farrier is. Your name will be given, but be assured no one will offer up the fact that the owner does not have you out for regular trims and the person asking is not likely to ask for that bit of information. That makes it appear that you are a bad farrier because these horses have bad feet. In other words, your reputation is on the line here. I encourage you to insist that the horse is kept on a regular schedule, or the owner should find another provider.*

### Keeping Customers Satisfied

If you want to succeed in business, make it easy to be a customer. Obtaining a customer is not the end goal; it should be the beginning of a long relationship. Satisfied customers mean repeat business and ongoing income for you. It's not simply about doing the job and getting paid, you want customers to continue using your service. Maintaining a customer is as important as obtaining one. Customers are the foundation upon which your business stands. Each customer, both human and equine, should be treated as you would want to be treated and respected because they are the most important asset to your business. People who have a good relationship with their hoof care provider tend to be very loyal and are likely to speak favorably about you when they tell others



about your service...and they will tell others. Don't turn away from the owners who only have one or two horses, especially when you are getting started. I have found these owners to be the most loyal and the biggest source of additional customers because they tell everyone they know about me. Additionally, the small owner's horses are just as deserving of your care as a \$50,000 show horse. Being flexible and adaptable will go a long way to ensuring your business survival and longevity. You certainly don't have to bend over backwards beyond reason, but do your best to accommodate your customer's needs and it will return big dividends in long term loyalty and favorable word of mouth as you build your business. There are little things that you can do to show customers that you appreciate them and their business. A "Thank You for Your Business" statement printed on your invoices is always a good idea. Sending Christmas/Hanukkah cards is a nice way to let customers know you appreciate having had their business throughout the year and that you look forward to a continued relationship in the coming year. Some practitioners give small, inexpensive year-end gifts to their customers such as a few pieces of chocolate or cookies wrapped in cellophane and tied with a ribbon that has their business card attached. Some practitioners have small calendars of the coming New Year custom printed with their contact information and give those to customers; here's an example from the same site that makes farrier business cards mentioned earlier in this book. <http://www.hoofprints.comiorganizers.html>

### Making Sure Your Customers Are Always Covered

What if you get sick or injured and are out of commission for an extended period of time? One of the great things about having your own business is the flexibility you have to set your schedule. However, if you are laid up for a long time, your customers will be left suddenly without anyone to care for their horses' feet. To address this potential problem, you should establish a relationship with another Natural Hoof Care Provider in your area. This other person may be willing to temporarily take over your customers and still be willing to return them to you when you are well. You should be willing to do the same for them. If there are no others who are doing Natural Hoof Care in your area, there are certainly some traditional farriers with whom you should be able to establish a friendly working relationship who might cover for you if the need arises. Some great "insurance" for the horses in your care should you be out of commission, is to make a habit of encouraging your customers to learn to do basic maintenance trimming on their own horses. It will not only give them a sense of empowerment, increase their understanding and respect for your skills and how hard you work, but also it will allow them to at least keep their horses out of trouble if you are incapacitated for a time.

## Be On Time

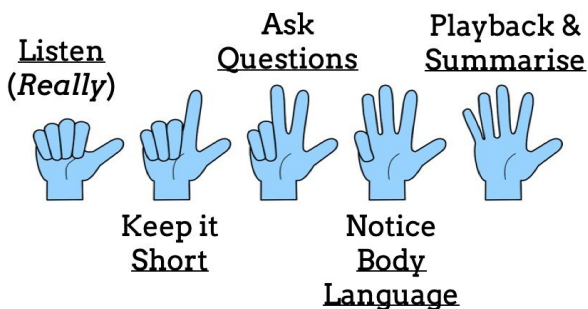
This subject has been mentioned several times already, however, I can't stress enough how important this is to building good customer relations as well as your good reputation. Let me repeat...the #1 complaint about farriers by horse owners is not showing up on time, or at all. Do not be numbered among them!!



## Good Communication

It is no secret that good communication is the foundation for any relationship. One of the key reasons for customer dissatisfaction, in any industry, is that in some way, their expectations were not met. The equine industry is loaded with unrealistic expectations and hoof care is a prime target. The more work you put into educating your customers and encouraging them to research what you do, the less likely you are to run into negative customer relationship issues. Your ability to keep people informed, to address and circumvent any misunderstandings can make or break you in this, or any service oriented business.

One of the most common communication problems I see in natural hoof care practitioners, particularly those new to the field, is



"blurting." What I mean by blurting is this: all the implications for improved health and soundness that natural hoof care offers, is very exciting to say the least. We all want to shout from the highest mountain top and compel every one to realize what we already know. Exposing people to all the concepts involved in what we do; lifestyle, diet, hoof care, etc., requires the transmission of a lot of information, but it cannot be given all at once. Practitioners often try to talk about too much, too fast, excitedly jumping from topic to topic, frequently not even finishing one sentence before they remember something else, equally as important and exciting, and jump off to talk about that. The practitioner is

blurting out bits of this subject, then that subject, without presenting a complete and concise picture of anything. The owner is bombarded with a confused array of information and instructions, nodding absently as their eyes glaze over and their brain shuts down. Stick to the basics. Keep it concise and build on what you teach the owner with each subsequent visit. Suggest reading material to give them a knowledge base by which to understand you. Learn to gauge your audience and adjust your communication accordingly. If you are not sure of your communication skills, enlist some friends to test drive your approach and ask them for honest feedback, or tape yourself and listen to the playback...you'll be surprised at what you hear! Learn how to be an effective communicator. If you are not, you will lose the interest and respect of the owners and the horse is the one that ultimately pays the price.

## Out of Harms Way

Sooner or later, if you stay in this business long enough, you will get hurt. Hopefully your injuries will be minor (toes stepped on, bruise from being kicked, etc.). There is an inherent risk for injury anytime you work with horses, and hoof care is among the riskiest. Your best defense is prevention. Never forget that if you do this work full time and are seriously injured, you cannot work...if you cannot work, you cannot pay your bills, feed your family, feed your own animals...in other words there is a huge ripple effect.

## Horse Handling

Good horse handling skills and a keen ability to read equine body language are the best tools to keep you safe when working with horses. You do not have to be a consummate horse trainer, but you need to have some degree of savvy. You need to develop a "sixth sense" about the horse to know such things as when it is about to pull away, strike out, or try to nip. If you feel you are lacking in this area, take the time to learn as much as you can about how to communicate with and handle horses safely. Refer to Appendix 2 for suggested reading material.





## Location

Horsekeeping arrangements vary wildly from owner to owner. Some have extravagant barns with concrete isles, or wash racks with floor mats where farriers do their work. Some have no barn at all. Most will have at least a run-in shed, but some don't even have that. In some locations I have found it difficult to locate a flat spot large enough to accommodate both me and the horse I am to trim. Whether you trim horses inside the barn or outside in the field, you must be mindful that the location be as safe as possible.

### In barns:

Cross ties are commonly used, however, I am not a big fan of cross ties and not all horses are sufficiently trained to stand in them. I have seen too many "wrecks" happen in cross ties when a horse panics and rips them out of the wall or off the halter then bolts down the barn aisle. If cross ties are used, make sure they have a quick release snap on both ends of each tie to release the horse should it panic. However, having quick release snaps still doesn't guarantee your safety. One customer of mine received a serious facial injury when her horse panicked in cross ties and she reached out to release the snap at the halter. The horse's head, suddenly free, whipped around and smashed her in the face. In another situation, the owner released the snap and the tie itself lashed around as the horse pulled free, the snap hitting him in the face. Needless to say, I don't care for cross ties. Additionally, I prefer the horse be able to lower its head so it can balance itself, particularly when I am working on the hind feet. Crossties keep the head high which is uncomfortable for the horse, stressing the neck and back and making it more difficult to balance when lifting its feet. Make sure barn aisles are clear of objects (buckets, brooms, pitch forks, etc.). Horses shift around while being trimmed — particularly those with pain issues, and clutter in the aisle way is a safety hazard, especially if you need to move quickly out of the way. Concrete floors are nice, but if you are stepped on (and you will be, sooner or later) and your foot is trapped between 1000 pounds of horse and unyielding concrete, it is more likely you will have a fracture rather than just a bruise. I still like concrete floors, especially in wet weather (sure beats standing in mud!), but I have come to appreciate the difference that the slight yield of dirt, or a mat provides after my foot was broken by a draft mare on concrete.



### In paddocks or pastures:

Many experienced trimmers will drive into a pasture, hop out and trim the horses without tying them, or without anyone being there to hold them. If they have been working with the horses for some time, they may not even put a halter on...just walk around and trim them at liberty. The reason they can do that is that some have a high level of horse savvy and some are just foolhardy! HOWEVER,...I do not suggest that you do this, or even aspire to do this as some goal of competency. It is not smart; it is not safe. Having other horses milling about loose while you are bent over and concentrated on the one you are trimming can easily get you killed...in the blink of an eye. Consider this; one kick from a passing horse at another horse (or the one you are trimming) misses the target and hits you...you are bent over with your head in the most likely strike zone. Get the picture? Have someone with you to hold the horse you are trimming, or at the least be there to chase away the other horses crowding around. If you are alone, pull the horse out of the pasture and work with it on the other side of the fence. If the other horses run off and the horse you are trimming gets upset, you can tie one of its pasture mates nearby. This is one of the reasons I carry two halters with me.



## Body Mechanics (yours and the horse's)



One of the biggest obstacles for new practitioners to overcome is gaining the cooperation of their own body while trying to trim. The most common injury for hoof care professionals (but one that is not immediately apparent) is the result of strain over time. Trimming horses requires that you use your body in ways that no other activity of daily living requires. If you are a compassionate and conscientious person, you will always be considering the comfort of the horse (especially old, arthritic, or laminitic horses in pain) which means you will sometimes need to contort your body in ways you never thought possible. For some of the most severe cases, you may need to trim the horse while it's lying on the ground. Old, arthritic horses cannot lift their legs very high without discomfort, requiring you to bend down even more to reach the foot.

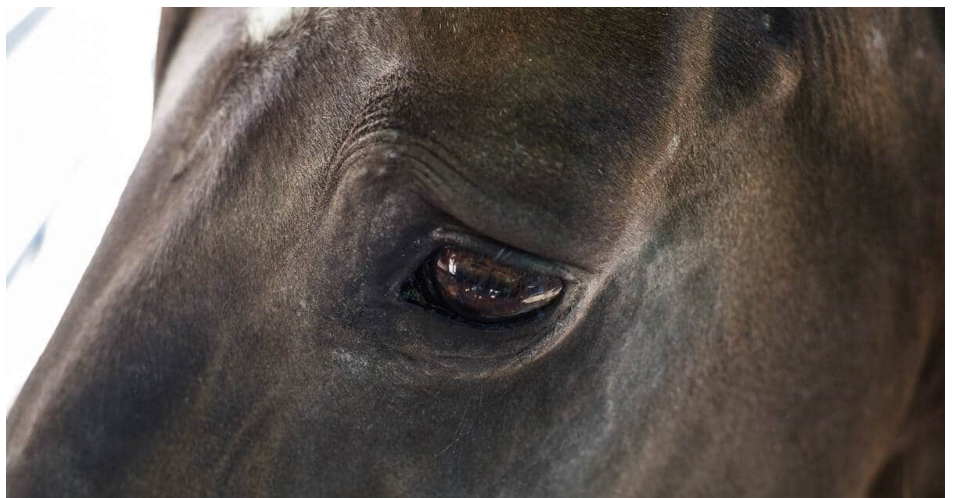
Fussy or frightened horses will move around or pull away... you need to develop a sense of when to let go as well as adapting your posture to keep out of the way while still able to trim. It is important that you position the horse for balance before picking up a foot. An unbalanced horse is more likely to lean or pull which not only will add to your fatigue, but also puts you at risk for injury. It is worth your while to observe some experienced practitioners and explore some of the videos available on trimming to get an idea of ways to position yourself and the horse for maximum effectiveness and safety. You can increase your own flexibility through such activities as Yoga, or Pilates.

## Mental state (yours and the horse's)

No matter how calm, sweet, and accommodating a horse may be, never forget that it is a nomadic prey animal that lives in a herd and operates on flight or fight instinct. This same instinct tells the horse — no matter how domesticated it is - that if it is alone, it is likely to be someone's dinner. While most horses don't generally show it, being alone stresses the animal. Pay attention to the horse you are about to trim; if it seems tense and it is in the barn alone or you have pulled it out of a pasture and the other horses have wandered away, then this horse is going to be more difficult and thus more dangerous for you to trim. Stand the horse next to another horse. Either bring another horse into the barn, or go get another horse from the "back forty" and tie it nearby if you are trimming outside.

## Horses in Pain

One of the biggest selling points of the Natural Hoof Care Practitioner is the recovery of horses that routinely accepted practices have failed to help. In some cases, the primary farrier and veterinarian have given up on the horse as incurable. This is the reason we are called in on many of these cases. We are the owner's last desperate grab at hope for their horse. As a result, you will have a number of horses in your practice in varying degrees of pain, some of them quite severe. Horses that cannot stand will require you to crawl around among the legs while you trim the feet. Horses that can stand but are in



pain, will be unsteady and will not be able to hold up a foot for very long. Placing a piece of thick soft padding under a sore foot will make it easier (and safer) for you to pick up the opposing foot. You need to schedule extra time for these horses to avoid feeling rushed, transmitting that stress to the horse, and setting yourself up for carelessness that can injure you or the horse, because you are in a hurry.



## Fatigue

Fatigue will be your companion in this business. For most of us, most of the time, it is the kind of fatigue that leaves you feeling satisfied at the end of the day knowing that you have made a difference. However, fatigue increases your risk of injury on the job and while driving. Some practitioners believe that the more horses in one's business, the better the practitioner is... nothing could be farther from the truth. Early in your career, you will not be able to do many in a day. That will change as you gain experience, strength, and mastery over your body mechanics. Don't push it. Stand up and walk around if you start feeling tired and/or weak, and if your wrists or back feel strained. Remember to drink plenty of fluids, especially water. This is important not only in the summer, but also in the winter when many people do not realize they are dehydrated. Even mild dehydration, as well as fatigue, can affect your attentiveness and reactions. Recognize and respect your own limitations and don't push them.



## Clothing



Another safety element that may seem too obvious to mention (but I will anyway) is your clothing. If you ever took riding lessons, you will recall that proper attire was a big factor in the overall mandates of equestrian safety given to you by your instructor. The same applies to your work as a hoof care professional. Such things as loose fitting floppy shirts, shorts, and tennis shoes have no place around horses. Loose clothing can get caught on things and inhibit your movement if you need to get out of the way of a fractious horse.

Tennis shoes will offer little protection for your toes when the inevitable time comes that a horse stomps your foot. Granted, no shoe or boot will guarantee protection from a 1000-pound horse landing on your foot, but leather boots will give you a fighting chance to avoid a fracture. Now you might be thinking that a steel-toed boot would be a good safety measure — just the opposite. The metal inside steel-toed boots is in no way strong enough to ward off the force of a descending horse. In fact, it will quite easily collapse down and there you are with your toes crushed by the metal inside the boot. Now you have just bought yourself a trip to the hospital to have it cut off your foot.

**DUH alert!** Ladies! Long hair, bracelets, long necklaces, dangle or hoop earrings, and large rings all pose a hazard in varying degrees. Sooner or later they will get caught on something. Tie up your hair, take off the hanging jewelry, and that giant diamond ring you are so proud of will not fare well with the rigors of this business....do you really want the stone lost in someone's barnyard?

## Keeping Fit and Eating Healthy

For many of us with busy practices, many hours are spent sitting in the truck, driving from barn to barn. It is common to leave before sun up and return well after sun down. While many of us prefer not to eat much when trimming (bending over with a full belly does not go well generally!) eating well is important to fitness and a big challenge on the road with limited healthy options at fast food places. Planning ahead and preparing healthy food to take on the road is necessary. As much as I know this intellectually, when I get home after a long day, the last thing I want to do is prepare tomorrow's travel meals. Summer is easy; I can carry sandwiches along. But in the winter, I want hot food so I'm more likely to grab hot fast food. That is very bad for the waistline! I have found some answers at truck stops where they sell such interesting appliances as crock pots and even small microwaves that plug into the lighter socket, or power port in your vehicle. A quick stop along my route at a major chain grocery store's deli department nets some healthy options that I can heat on the go in the winter, or toss in the cooler in the summer. But we get plenty of exercise trimming every day, right? Wrong! Think about it. Hoof care is a strength activity, not an aerobic activity. Sumo wrestlers are strength athletes; runners are aerobic athletes. Have you ever heard the term "farrier's belly?" We get out of the truck, trim, get back in the truck and drive. We sit, and we eat while we drive. That repeats over and over, all day, every day. If we are not careful, we will look like Sumo wrestlers. The only "aerobic activity" in hoof care is the rare occasion when a hoof whizzes past your head as a horse kicks out and just misses...THAT will get your heart rate up! But only for a minute or two! All kidding aside, going to the



gym after a long hard day (which is most days) is another thing I have no motivation for when I get home. I try to incorporate more movement in to my routine by parking at a distance from a store so that I must walk farther. I carry those elastic exercise bands in the truck to work out a bit when sitting in traffic. Sure, I probably look like a nut to the neighboring drivers, but...oh well! Use your imagination and do anything you can to move more. Just as you encourage owners to encourage movement for their horse's healthy lifestyle, it is as important for yours.

### Difficult Animals

Most people who hire you will be those who try to take good care of their horses, but as you will quickly realize, the concept of "good care" varies widely. Most horses will be well mannered and used to having their feet handled. However, there will be some that have either never (or minimally) had their feet handled, or some that have had a bad experience with their feet such as injury or rough treatment by a previous hoof care professional. Do not make snap judgments about particular breeds because of their size or because of industry stereotypes about breed behavior, for example; "stubborn" drafts or "high-strung" Arabs. Approach each new horse as an individual and educate yourself on "horse etiquette" so you can determine what certain behaviors mean. Learn to read the primary language of horses — body language. Become sensitive to what each signal might mean — flattened ears, rapidly swishing tail, cocked foot, etc. Pay attention to your own body language and what your expressions and postures might be transmitting about you to the horse. Horses interpret what your intentions might be with their eyes, ears and noses. They

can sense fear, aggression, anxiety and other emotions easily from our body postures, voice and eyes. Perceived emotions such as fear and aggression make a horse nervous and can escalate a situation from uneasy caution to a violent physical response as the horse tries to get away from a perceived danger. Horses are prey animals and their first response to danger is flight — to run away. Sometimes the only path of escape will take the animal right over top of you. Their size compared to yours means that a horse versus human impact will never bode as well for the human! More common than the truly dangerous, rogue horse, is the horse that is very friendly but undisciplined. In other words, it simply has not been properly trained. Owners who mean well, do not realize that treating a 1000-pound horse like a human child, teaches the horse nothing about the horse/human respect necessary to keep you both (horse and human) calm, cooperative, and safe. These horses are not being "bad", they are being horses and trying to interact with you as they would with any other horse. They do



not recognize that they must respect you in the same manner as they would the herd matriarch unless you teach them, so they are pushy and fidgety, and in the young ones, they are very mouthy — even nipping with their teeth as they try to interest you in fun horse games. Finally, the "difficult" horses you will encounter nearly every day are those that don't mean to be "bad"...they are in pain. Most of the horses you provide care to will likely have pain somewhere in their bodies to varying degrees. You must be able to recognize the difference between resistance from bad behavior and resistance from pain. You must learn to accommodate the horse's physical issues. For example, you would hold the leg lower, or not bend the joints as far, in an arthritic horse. Attention to body pain in the horse will make your job much easier and the horse will be more likely to try to cooperate with you.

### Mules and Donkeys

I mention the "longears" segment of the equine population, not because they are by nature difficult, but because people often perceive them as so. Most horse people just do not realize that donkeys and mules do not think, or react, in the same way as horses. They do not respond to you the same way that horses do, even if you are quite skilled at "speaking horse." They are not horses and they have their own variation of the equine "language." Invariably you will be called upon to trim mules and donkeys. If you do not understand them AND their owners do not understand them (which is usually the case) they will be some of your more difficult clients! When people try to handle any of the longears' in the same manner they are used to handling horses, trouble invariably

follows. Personally I adore mules and donkeys, especially donkeys, but I had to learn how to relate to them on their terms. It would be a good idea for you to educate yourself on the differences and perhaps even encourage their owners to do the same. The best place to start is with a book by Meredith Hodges, "Training Mules and Donkeys, A Logical Approach to Longears" or Longears Logic as Meredith's teachings have come to be known. This book contains an overview on the psychological differences in mules and donkeys and training techniques to be used with them. She also offers a more detailed video series on the subject. Visit her web site for books and videos <http://www.luckythreeranch.com/prodcat.asp>.

### Your Temper

Losing your temper is never the best idea in any relationship. Losing your temper with a horse can have disastrous consequences both personally and professionally. Another common complaint owners have about farriers, second only to not showing up on time, is the farrier losing his or her temper and hitting their horse with the rasp or hammer. While there is never an excuse for a professional to lose their temper, once you have been working in the field, sooner or later, you will come to realize how hoof care professionals come to the point of being short tempered. After years of injuries from unruly horses, abuse taken and disrespect from difficult owners, it's no wonder why some farriers are quick to anger. When you have dealt with enough of the same, you will understand as you fight to keep your temper in trying situations. However, there is still no excuse for losing your temper. If you feel as if your temper is rising, take a break, go to your truck and calm down. If necessary, reschedule for another day. If it is an impossible situation, drop the customer...politely of course...by telling them you are not able to provide what they need and suggest they find someone else.

**How to stay calm, no matter what...**

		
Remember that the quickest way to lose is to <b>lose your temper</b>	To regain control, hit <b>PAUSE</b> (breathe)	Before acting, ask yourself: "Why am I doing this?"

### When Enough is Enough

Years ago, I had a customer once with a big, middle-aged, heavily built gelding. This horse was a nightmare to trim. He would yank his feet and slam them on the ground before I could get even a hoof pick going. He would kick out with his hinds when I attempted to pick them up and if I held on, he would stiffen his leg and put all his weight in it, pushing violently toward the ground, forcing me to let go. Several times he seemed to aim for my foot and came very close to catching my toes under his swift, pounding hoof. If I had not been able to curl my toes quickly inside my boots, I have no doubt I would have suffered one or more broken toes. At the same time this horse was giving me trouble with handling his feet; he was pushing his owner (who held the lead rope) with his head and repeatedly nipping at her arm. In response to his bites she would dodge as best she could, swish her hand at his nose and calmly tell him to "stop that." This owner would have nasty bruises on her arms from the bites she was not quick enough to avoid and yet she would stand calmly resigned to her belief that "That's just the way he is." I recognized this horse's behavior as a complete lack of respect for his human associates that had been allowed to continue for years. I decided to continue to try to work with this horse and owner in hopes of helping them both. After explaining to the owner my feeling that this horse lacked respect, I discussed a plan of action. My intention was to make this horse realize that doing the wrong thing (slamming his feet and kicking out) would result in an uncomfortable situation for him. I told her that every time he yanked or slammed down his foot, or kicked out, I would say "go" and she was to immediately back him up the entire length of the barn aisle (this barn was a converted chicken house so it was very long). Backing up is physically taxing for any horse compared to moving forward. For this horse — heavily muscled and broad across the butt — it would be quickly exhausting. In less than 10 minutes, he had been backed at least eight times. He was sweating and breathing hard and he was becoming more compliant when I asked for his foot. To my utter amazement, the owner announced to me in a somewhat irritated tone that "this is just not working." Taken aback at her conclusion, I simply stared at her for a minute and at the big gelding now standing quietly at her side. Then I gave her my recommendation. "I'm sorry, but I am not going to trim your horse. Take him to a trainer who will work with both you and with your horse. He is dangerous because

you are allowing him to be and I cannot risk injury and neither should you." Oddly, she was distressed by my decision and asked if I would resume his hoof care if they had a successful outcome with the trainer. I agreed to reevaluate the situation if and when that time came. This was the first customer I dropped on the first day of working with them and I hated to do it, but it was not worth my health, or hers, to continue with this horse. The best service I could provide in this case was to direct her to seek help for both her horse and herself.

You will encounter owners with horses they can barely halter, cannot hold the horse, and absolutely cannot even pick up their feet to clean them out. Yet, they call you to come and trim the horse (neglecting to tell you this useful bit of information) and expect you to be able to trim the horse's feet. It astounds me to this day. To help you understand these owners, consider that many farriers carry and administer IV (intravenous) or IM (intramuscular) sedatives to unruly horses. Owners assume that we do the same thing. I do not, and I suggest that do not either. First and foremost, the administering of IV or IM medications by inserting a needle "breaks the blood barrier" and is the domain of a veterinarian. Even though many owners routinely give their own horses injections when needed, as a professional, you are liable in some states if you do it to a customer's horse. The only legal way to incorporate the giving of sedation to a horse under your care is if you are trained by a veterinarian and authorized by that veterinarian to proceed under his or her license with THAT vet's customers. For example, you might be given the okay by a vet to inject a horse that is already under his or her care, but that does not legally allow you to inject another horse - even if the owner asks you to - if that horse is not a customer of the vet who authorized you. It is far better, whenever possible, to work with a horse to build trust and eliminate fear than to force things in the beginning. If you also train horses professionally, then offer that service to the owner separate from your hoof care service. Otherwise, there is nothing noble about risking your life trying to care for a dangerous horse. Never hesitate to step away from such a situation.

## **Difficult People**

### **Customers**

Just as with the horses you will encounter, some people will be pleasant and easy to deal with and some will be more difficult. On the whole, most people who would fall into the category of "difficult" do not mean to be. In fact, they do not even realize they are creating tension for you. Some of the things owners do that are a source of frustration for hoof care professionals are: ☐ Waiting until you arrive before going to get the horses from the back forty. ☐ Waiting until you arrive to tell you the horse has never had its feet trimmed, and in fact is barely halter broken. ☐ Calling you several times between visits and talking for over an hour every time, when it is not an emergency situation. ☐ Asking to reschedule at the last minute, sometimes when you are already half way to their barn. It will be to your benefit, and ultimately to the benefit of the horses you are there to help, if you assume the difficult owner means well and is simply not aware. Diplomatic conversations should remedy the situation.

### **Other Horse Owners**

Since the concept of natural hoof care or "barefoot horses" is a break with modern tradition, some people become irrationally adversarial when they find out what you do. They generally have never taken the time to research the paradigm, and certainly have not bothered to ask you, or even listened to what you were saying when they overheard you talking to interested persons. They will latch onto one or two statements and will either confront you directly or stir up the gossips at the barn. Answer any questions calmly and professionally if they ask you directly, but don't get drawn into a raging debate. For many people, the very idea that their shod horse might be better off barefoot is tantamount to asking them to change their religion. Engaging in a heated point, counterpoint debate with people who are already upset is a no win situation. Your best bet is to calmly tell them that if what they are doing is working well for them then you wish them well and turn your attention back to those who are interested in hearing what you have to say. If your client is a "lone bare footer" at a boarding facility, or often rides with others who are not like-minded, let them know that they may have to deal with pressure from others who will tell them that not shoeing their horse is wrong, and cruel to the horse. Arm them with enough information to shore up their confidence, and enable them to state their case should they be pressured. You will find that most people who engage your services are already confident of their decision having done much research on their own before calling you, but there will be some folks who are still shaky and a bit fearful with the decision to go natural. Be supportive, but be prepared for the possibility that they will cave in to pressure.

### **Other Equine Professionals**

For the most part other professionals will be just that...professional. They might think you are completely nuts, but will remain



polite as they listen, or as they walk away. You should always remain professional while at the same time being prepared to defend your position. However, should another professional become angry or aggressive, keep your cool. There is no point to getting into a shouting match with an agitated person; anger shuts down one's ability to listen, so anything you might like to say will fall on deaf ears anyway. Your ability to maintain your dignity over the person, who is hopping up and down and ranting, will be noticed and appreciated by any observers. If the person calms, you might then attempt some reasonable discourse, otherwise, just walk away and go about your business. Being a person of integrity also includes not engaging in gossip, or "bad-mouthing" of other professionals, no matter how justified your opinions might be. Certainly, your credibility will be bolstered if you are certified with a reputable organization. However, since such organizations dedicated to Natural Hoof Care are relatively new and the field is still considered a "fringe element," don't count on a certificate making much of a difference to some people. That said, the programs that offer such certification are all that we have currently and are your only avenue for credentialing in Natural Hoof Care. If you already carry credentials with conventionally recognized professional groups such as established farrier or veterinary organizations, you are already ahead of the game. In the meantime, you can explore your options for certification as well as help to increase acceptance of all of us by supporting holistic groups, particularly those seeking to train and credential hoof care practitioners.

## **Growing Your Business**

### **Clinics and Presentations - Are You Ready?**

Many practitioners do presentations in their area for equestrian groups like Pony Clubs and Riding Clubs as well as groups of interested horse owners. Some hold clinics to help increase awareness and educate veterinarians, farriers, horse owners and ancillary equine professionals such as those who offer services in equine massage, sports medicine, equine chiropractic, equine dentistry, etc. Before you enthusiastically embark on a "mission" to convert the entire horse owning public in your locale, there are some things you should think about. Have you reached a level of knowledge, skill and confidence such that you are able to address the hard questions skeptics will throw at you? If you seem unsure, or hesitant in your answers, or cannot cite credible research, or cite cases you have managed personally, then you may be doing yourself and the "cause" harm when you are asked a hard question by a veteran farrier and you have no idea what he's talking about let alone how to answer. I suggest that you have, at a minimum, a year of practice in the field under your belt before you take on presentations and then keep it to a "presentation" format. Teaching others in clinics is best left to a time when you have several years of experience and skill. It just doesn't help sway the hard core resistance about the competence of natural hoof care practitioners if you are out there training people to do hoof care when you have only just taken up the rasp yourself. It will be helpful if you attend presentations and clinics held by others with more experience and get a sense of how they handle themselves and the audience. Many of them will be happy to help you by sharing their ideas and advice on how you can get started.

## **Final Thoughts**

The business of Natural Hoof Care is a challenging one indeed, but those who answer the call find themselves in a career that is infinitely satisfying. Helping horses regain their heritage of natural health, vigor, and soundness leaves you with a sense of true accomplishment at the end of the day. Knowing that you are part of a growing movement that is changing the way people think about, and deal with, their horses is a source of pride. The level of commitment it takes to do this job well is, indeed, honorable. Welcome to the ranks and, on behalf of the horses, I thank you.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Gender issues**

Well, Ladies... let's face it... this business is one of the last bastions of male dominance. Sooner or later you will encounter that fact in the field to varying degrees, and it will happen over and over. No matter how successful and skilled you become, people will not always take you as seriously as your male counterparts, even if those men have less competency, less training and less skill than you. It won't always be men who judge you more critically; to the contrary...women are as likely, or even more likely, to be less confident with you as opposed to a man doing the same work. Most people are used to their farriers being male, and society in general tends to view the male as having more authority, skill, and knowledge than a female doing the same work. It is so ingrained that many people don't even realize that they carry that bias, no matter how much they might protest to the contrary. Another area where gender "tells" is in pricing. Generally speaking, men have little trouble charging what they are worth com-

pared to women. In fact, I have known of many men just entering into this business, with less than a year of experience, who seem to have no qualms about charging as much or more than seasoned veterans. Confidence tells and they are certainly confident! Women tend to undervalue themselves in general and thus we often do not feel comfortable charging as much as the men. As we have already discussed, Natural Hoof Care Providers charge more than the average farrier for a trim and the "sticker shock" of owners seems to be less intense if it's a man handing them the bill. It's just the way things are. It doesn't mean men are "bad"...it is simply the different ways in which men and women think and are perceived. It doesn't mean you should "think like a man" you are not a man; you should be who you are. But it does mean that you can learn from the men. Enlist male friends, associates, or your spouse to give you their input and perspective to help you overcome any hesitations, or doubts you have about what you are worth as a professional hoof care provider. Don't take it personally, don't let it jade you, just work through it and get out there and help horses. That is what you are there to do, that is where you are needed and THAT makes your worth...priceless!!

## **Appendix 2**

### **Equine Body Language**

A common truth with most horses is that they are very honest creatures. No matter how wild they are, or difficult they may seem, they are showing you just what they're thinking and feeling if you know where to look. Like most animals, a horse's eyes are usually directed at whatever it is that is on his mind. For example, if a horse is standing there looking at you, you can be pretty sure that he's thinking about you (unless it's one of those times he is standing in the sun, dozing happily, not really seeming to think about anything—just like people do). You need to stay tuned into the horse's body language to get a feel of what he's thinking or feeling, and what you need to be ready for. Below is a list of suggested reading material: "Horsewatching" by Desmond Morris Crown Publishers, Inc. 225 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10003 "Talking With Horses" by Henry Blake 1976 E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. "The Nature of Horses" by Stephen Budiansky The Free Press, Division of Simon & Schuster Inc "The Body Language of Horses" by Tom Ainslie and Bonnie Ledbetter William Morrow & Co., Inc. 105 Madison Ave. New York, NY 10016 Ten Golden Rules of Horse Training: Universal Laws for all Training Levels By Bruce Nock, PhD Half Halt Press, P.O. Box 67, Boonsboro, MD 21713

## **Appendix 3**

### **Sources of Information and Help**

Small Business Administration [www.sba.gov/](http://www.sba.gov/) This web site is packed with information and resources to help you start and operate a small business. You can also locate your local office by looking in you phone book under "U.S." Government. Internal Revenue Service [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) The web site has forms and publications that can be downloaded as well as other helpful information to keep you out of trouble! Some publications you might find helpful are: ☐ Small Business Resource Guide (Publication 3207, CD ROM) ☐ Tax Guide For Small Business (Publication 334) ☐ Starting a Business and Keeping Records (Publication 583) ☐ Self-Employment Tax (Publication 533) ☐ Business Use of Your Home (Publication 587) ☐ Business Use of a Car (Publication 917 Turbo Tax [www.turbotax.com](http://www.turbotax.com) This popular software helps users with personal and business tax preparation . It includes reference material and allows you to file electronically. Additional modules are available for filing with your state. You can choose TurboTax as software for your desktop computer or you can file directly from their website. TurboTax is available just about anywhere software is sold. NASE (National Association for the Self Employed) [www.nase.org](http://www.nase.org) This organization offers many resources for small businesses, as well as member benefits including major medical and dental health insurance. Insurance Since this business is inherently high-risk for injury, you should carry medical insurance. If your spouse can add you to their company insurance policy, that is all the better. However, to keep your business expenses (and deductions) neatly separate; you might consider your own individual insurance policy. There are many web sites such as [www.healthinsurance.org](http://www.healthinsurance.org) that provide online assistance in getting quotes from all major underwriters for your insurance needs.