

# Smart & Simple STOCKMANSHIP

BY BUD WILLIAMS

**W**hile stockmanship is quite simple, it's difficult for people to learn because it often goes against human behavior.

Remember, as a stockman you are the one who is supposed to be smart and it's up to you to figure out the animal.

Animals can be trained to work for you, just like a horse can be trained to be ridden. They can be trained by using your position in relationship to them and understanding their natural behavior. This allows the animal to do what it wants and what you want at the same time.

Working animals is like driving a car in traffic. Because we are unable to verbally communicate with the other driver, our position on the road is important and is our primary means of communication. If from an oncoming car's position we see that it will go past us we feel little stress, but if we see it's headed straight toward us we will start to feel the adrenaline pumping. If the traffic slows down, we slow down. If you don't pay attention to the position of others in the traffic a wreck will occur. It's the same way with animals.

Luckily, with animals usually the worst thing that can happen if you lose your position is that they can get away for awhile. Just as being a skilled driver requires watching the road and position of the other drivers, my method of handling animals requires that the stockman always pay attention to his animals.

People are now getting more interested in stress in animals and how to prevent it. They are also more concerned about pasture

management than in the past. The method I use to work animals reduces stress in both the animals and in the people working them. It can also be used to help a person get better management of his pastures.

Most people use fear and force and neither of these should be used. When untrained animals are put in a large pasture and fear is used to gather them, they will always be hard to gather. If cattle are put into a pasture under stress because of the way they were worked, these cattle will not be happy and unhappy cattle will be difficult to manage from a forage point of view.

This is all a matter of training. Trained cattle worked by trained people will use the

forage properly and will also be easy to gather.

While working in the Arctic with reindeer, officials would take me out with helicopter and put me down in sight of the deer. These reindeer were just about as wild as an animal can be and roamed a five million acre range with the corral having the only fence. I was on foot with one dog and yet within 18 to 20 hours I was able to gather 1,500 reindeer, walk them 20 miles and put them in a corral.

In other words, in only 18 to 20 hours I was able to train these deer to be driven and to walk into a corral. I do not tell this story to show you how good I am, but to let you know it's possible to gather animals under adverse conditions.

Briefly, learn to always work on the side of cattle. Don't push them from behind. Don't use loud noises or force. Use their natural behavior and your position in relationship to them.

## Flight zone or circle of safety

There is a circle around individual or groups of animals. When something comes inside this circle, the animal has its safety threatened. Animals react in different ways.

Some run off. Some stand their ground and if the intruder doesn't move off, they will fight. That's why it's also called the flight or fight zone.

When working animals, I use it all the time. I will try to explain how this is done.

First, we want to realize it's not a perfect circle. Next, the angle that we penetrate the circle is most important. In fact, it's probably the most important. Your speed is important, but not as important as the angle. The circle



# STOCKMANSHIP

can be increased or decreased as you go along with the animals. The circle diameter will be increased as the animal comes up to a fence or other obstacle as that will cause pressure on the other side and cause the distance to increase on your side.

In theory, if you step one foot inside the circle the animal should move and if you step outside the circle the animal should stop. Almost, but not quite.

If you walk directly toward the animal, it may let you penetrate the circle quite a ways before it runs or fights, but then it will not stop just because you step outside the circle.

If you approach at such an angle that you are right on the edge of the circle, as you walk the animal will respond by raising its head, acting nervous or by moving off. At this time if you immediately step outside the circle, the animal will stop, then you will know where to work the animal from.

In order to find this spot, you may have to approach in a zig-zag pattern. This may seem foolish and take extra time, but it doesn't take as long as having to stop an animal that takes off running the wrong way. With practice you will learn when to zig-zag in your approach and when it will not be necessary.

Think about driving across a vacant parking lot. Off at an angle a car is approaching directly toward you. When the car is 200 to 300 feet away, you get nervous and start to do something.

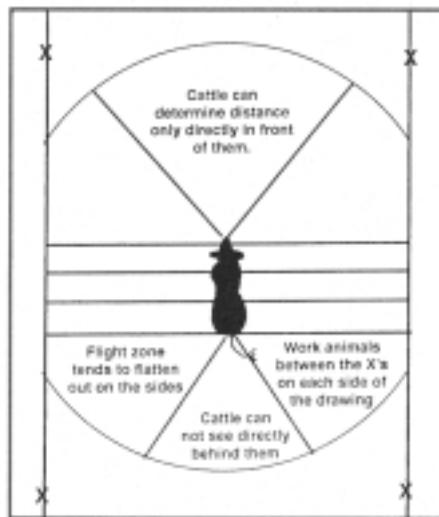
But if you are driving across the same parking lot and the car is coming almost directly at you, but just to one side, it will pass within a few feet of your car and will hardly be noticed.

Now we are able to find the edge of the circle. We want to find the spot around the circle that we can move the animal from, and have it go the direction we want, at a speed we can control. There is always such a spot and this spot moves as the animals move. It you stay with this spot it's possible to work any domestic animal and keep in the right spot by just walking. In fact, if you are running it's because of some mistakes that are not being corrected by getting at the right spot.

Now, how to get the right direction. Try to remember how animals react as you approach. They will turn their head to look or may turn their whole body to face you. Animals like to go the direction they are facing. Now, if we know how to find the edge of the circle and can get the animal to move and to stop, and we know the animal will look at us as we approach and it likes to go in the direction it's looking, then we

should be able to find the spot that will move the animal, at the speed we want, and in the direction we want.

After the animal is moving, all we have to do is stay on the edge of the circle, moving in and out to maintain the speed we want. To keep or change direction we move back or forward along the edge of the circle almost always staying to the side of the animal. If you get behind, this will tend to turn them one way or the other as they want to see you.



This will not make an expert out of you overnight, but it might help and give you some questions to ask. It took me five years of experimenting just to find out how to get one spot that would move the animal, get the speed I wanted and the direction all at the same time, and be able to do it nearly every time. So if it takes you a few times to grasp, don't get discouraged.

## Animal movement

One of the most important and probably least understood things is how to use the movement of animals to help. When a herd of animals is moving, it's almost perpetual motion. The lead animal draws the back animal. As it steps up, this puts pressure on the lead animal so it keeps going. It takes so little to keep this going, but it also takes so little to stop it.

When the herd stops sometimes it takes a lot to get it going again. Also, if you help it too much it may be hard to stop.

While driving animals, the direction of the herd is important, but the direction of the individual animal within the herd is just as important. When a person is moving around the herd to different positions, he/she should at all times be aware of any

change of direction in the individual animals as this will tell the person if his position is right or wrong.

If you are riding or walking up alongside a herd and the animals alongside you start to turn away from you, turn and go toward the back, as you are too close or too far to the front. If you continue on, the cattle turning across the herd will slow or stop the cattle behind them and with nothing following the front, this will tend to slow or stop them.

When bringing along the back of the herd, if it's spreading out so that you or someone has to keep pushing them back into the herd, this back and forth movement will slow down the movement of the whole herd. When this happens the cattle are telling you there is more pressure on the back end than they will stand.

When the cattle are telling you this, try riding back and forth across the back. As you go across, keep going until you are clear to the outside of the cattle. When the animals ahead of you turn back toward the herd, this will tell you when you are to the outside of the cattle.

If the cattle are moving well, proceed in this position. If the animals are slowing down, go across the back again. Don't try to push the entire herd from this position. Only use this to make the back end keep up. The back end must have space to move into when they are pressured. If they don't have space then someone should get the front moving. Then the back can be pressured.

When driving a herd of animals, if there are some off to the side that have to be brought into the herd, don't try to bring them straight into the herd as this will slow or stop the herd. Bring the animals in at an angle that will help the movement of the herd.

In order to accomplish this, as the animals start toward the herd ride across the back of them in the direction of the back of the main herd. This will turn the animals slightly. As soon as you get the angle you want, proceed in this position until the animals are part of the main herd.

Now we are approaching the corral. We have a good movement going. We have been using the triangle pattern, going toward the lead cattle at the right spot (the animals have told us the right spot). As it speeded up we turned and proceeded back alongside the herd to keep the movement going. By now everything is going good, so let's keep doing what got us here.

At this point, move to the lead. Time it so you get to the lead and are moving in to

pressure them just as the animals are approaching the gate. Don't try to get in and push them through, just go directly at their side. As they speed up to go through the gate, turn to the back. Go just a short ways, then turn and go out, go to the lead, then in until they speed up, then back toward the back. Keep this up until all the animals are in the corral.

Now the animals are standing in the corral, quiet, just the way we like. The movement of the animals put them in the corral with just a little help from us, and they told us where to help. Because we did what they wanted, the animals did what we wanted.

This will cause very little stress on the animals as they were doing what they wanted, not being forced to do something they didn't want to do.

You have the cattle in the corral. They are nice and quite and you want to keep them that way. In the corral you may be inside their flight zone most of the time. Now you must use your position to move the animals in such a way that they don't panic.

I use the word pressure. As pressure is applied to move the animals, it must be released when they move — either by you stepping back, or by the fact that they move ahead and that takes off the pressure.

Constant pressure with no let-up, or excessive pressure is what panics animals in a corral.

Loud noise is almost always excessive pressure. When animals try to cut back they are being pressured too much, or from the wrong spot. When you crowd the back animal too hard and there is no place for it to go, it will try to cut back. That is why the front animals should have pressure applied to them.

As they move, then there is room for the back animals to move into as they are pressured. The front animals should be pressured from the side. This allows the animal to move away from our pressure, which it wants, and for it to be going where we want it to.

Millions of animals are worked from the back, pushed and yelled at, but this does not make it the best way to work animals.

Our domestic animals at one time were herd animals. This was because of the social and safety benefits the herd provided. But because of the way we work our animals the herd is not always a safe place. In order to get the most production from our pastures and our animals, we need a stress-free herd. Fencing helps but it's not the total answer.

If we learn to work our animals from the

side and not to pressure too much, after a while the herd will be a safe place. Then we will be able to manage our animals in such a way that they will better manage our forage.

### Pressure, not push

One thing that gives people problems about my method of working livestock is my constantly telling them not to push from behind an animal. This doesn't mean that you can't pressure some from behind, it only means that it's not the best place to pressure from.

If the animals are turning out on the side, or trying to cut back, they are telling

when the animal steps ahead the pressure is relieved. That pleases the animal and we get what we want.

After a while, animals learn that all they have to do is move ahead and the pressure is taken off. This makes it much easier to drive stock and they are happy.

If it's necessary to be on the back end of a herd to keep them from going back, then ride across at right angles to the herd. That way as you pressure the animal it will move ahead and you will ride on by. Both of these things will relieve the pressure and keep the animals from trying to break out of the herd.

### Easy-does-it herd movement



If the front animals move along, the back will follow with little pressure.



Too much pressure on the back animals will hurt more than help.



Pressure from the side, not directly from the back.



Don't be so concerned with riding out to get animals on the side that you let the herd movement stop.



When you get close to the gate, don't back off and let the movement stop. Keep doing what you were.

the person not to push on the back, or that they are pushing too much. You will get better results if the pressure is applied from the side. I will try to explain why this is true.

If you are driving on the highway and someone comes up behind and is about 10 feet from you, you will speed up or slow down to let them go by. If they are still 10 feet behind this could be upsetting. But if a car comes up behind, then pulls out and rides alongside, but is still only 10 feet away this does not bother a person at all.

It's not always how close something is that bothers people or animals, but where it is in relation to their position. It's important to an animal that when they are pressured, the pressure will go on by, or that if they step ahead the pressure will be relieved.

If the pressure is applied from the rear, as the animal moves ahead to relieve the pressure the person will also move ahead. This keeps the pressure constant with no let-up.

If the pressure stays, the animal speeds up or pulls over (turns out) to let the pressure go by. If it's in a herd and there is no place for it to speed up to, then it is forced to take the pressure or cut back.

If the pressure is applied from the side,

In almost all situations where animals are being driven, it's important they feel that the pressure will go on by. This is very important and can't be stressed enough.

If an animal feels the pressure will not go on by then it feels threatened by the pressure and it will turn to face the pressure or run from it. Either one causes stress in the animal and takes it out of its natural behavior. This makes the animal much harder to work and will cause other problems.

If the animals feel the pressure will go on by (much like the person in the car), the animal will move, but will not be stressed by the pressure. This will allow a person to drive a happy animal, and everything will be better.

### Relieving animal stress

Stress that is put on animals is one of the major problems in the livestock industry. Stress that stays on animals causes the most damage.

It's like when a person has something stressful happen to them. The first day it may not be too bad. By the third or fourth day that person starts having headaches or problems with their stomach. As time goes

# STOCKMANSHIP

on it usually gets worse and worse.

But, if on the first day the stressful event happened, someone was able to convince the person the event wasn't that bad, that would be the end of the stress or at least the end of the damage caused by the stress. Stress causes health problems and production loss.

## Noise stress

We spent a week at the Maddox Ranch near Colorado City, Texas, in 1990. Joe and his son, Dalton, have an intensive grazing system that is doing a good job for them and for the land. They have both cattle and sheep.

Joe said the sheep make enough money they can afford to run cattle. While it was said in good humor, it was also probably true. I was there because they were considering herding their sheep and had some other questions.

Some interesting things happened while we were there that might be of interest to other people.

I always try to convince people that loud or excessive noise is bad and makes animals harder to handle. We brought in a large herd of cattle the first morning. These cattle belong to Wes James of Doole, Texas. He was not impressed that "some expert" was there to show how to work cattle.

When the cattle were put in the corral they sorted the calves from the cows. Wes had brought a sorting gate to put in the alley. As the cattle were put through this it worked quite well, but there was excess noise and it took two people to keep them going through.

After the sorting, we started pregnancy testing the cows. Joe asked me to pen the cows. Their chute is much like others around the country. When I started putting them in the chute, I would bring up about five at a time, made no noise and used no whip or stick. Most of the time I would be 10 to 20 feet to the back and side of them when they went in. Seldom was the gate on the crowd pen even used.

At lunch, the veterinarian Dr. Laird Lawrence of Fredricksburg, asked how I was able to get the cows to go into the chute without making some noise when staying that far away from them. My answer was "they went in because there was no noise to distract them."

As the day progressed, the noise level got lower and lower. At one point, just as a group of cows was starting into the chute, someone hollered to ask if there were any

more ear tags. The cows immediately turned back and were more difficult to get in after that. Everyone noticed this and even commented about it.

After pregnancy testing they were going to sort off the open cows. They asked if I could put them through the sorting gate with less trouble. Working in the pen at the side of the cows with no loud noise, only my presence, the cows went through easy and with no jamming or turning back. And this was done with no help.

### Keep in mind the following about cattle:



They like to see you.



They have very little patience (you must have more).



They like to go in the direction they are headed.



They like to go to other animals.



They don't like to be pushed from behind.

One of the cowboys who had helped put them through earlier in the day commented that from now on he would do it that way as it was easier and safer.

When they started loading the calves, the truck driver had his volume turned up to "high" but everything else was quiet. When we started to load the last group, Wes had some big bulls to load, also. By this time, everyone was quiet. They wanted the bulls on the bottom. The bulls just walked on with no noise, no one poking or anything.

Some open cows were with them and they filled the bottom before all the bulls were on. Wes said he wanted the bulls on the bottom so we let the bulls and cows walk back off the truck, sorted some of the cows off, turned the bulls around and they walked back on with no noise, no poking or anything but our presence at the right spot.

After the truck was loaded I made the comment that they loaded with no noise and Wes said, "Yes, and no one will yell around my cattle again."

After the cows had stopped bawling and settled down, we were going to take them back to the pasture which was quite a

distance away. They had to go through four gates on the way. Earlier, when I was asked how many people would be needed to gather and bring the cows to the corral, I made the statement that if I was able to work with them a little while, my wife and I could bring them to the corral and take them back. Four of us drove them back to the pasture. There was no yelling. No one pushed the back end of the cattle. They were driven all the way from the side.

After we got to the pasture, Joe said, "Any two of us could have drove them with no problems."

## Attitude adjustment

When working animals our overall attitude is important.

Many years ago, it came to me after much hard work and frustration, that it was my fault when things went wrong. It wasn't the animals fault as they were only doing what I was causing them to do. Therefore, if that wasn't what I wanted, then maybe I should quit causing them to do it. This has helped me more than anything else I've learned over the years.

Having had the good fortune to observe people working animals — from Alaska to Central America — everyone used the same basic principle to work animals. That is to go out and chase them from where the animals were, to where the people wanted them to go. You probably realize that I don't think this is the best way to work animals.

My method takes the animals' natural behavior into consideration and makes us change our natural behavior.

This is difficult for most people to do. Develop just a little patience, learn to read your animals and let them tell you where you should position yourself. Then relax just a little bit, and let good things happen instead of getting demanding and getting impatient and causing bad things to happen.

After 50 years of working with animals, the last 25 years using my method, I still have problems. But because of the attitude and experience I have developed, I'm able to correct almost any problem with minimum of effort.

**Editors note:** Bud Williams teaches low-stress livestock handling at his Stockman's School. For more information, contact: Bud or Eunice Williams, Box 2220, Lloydminster, Alba., Canada T9V 1R6. This report reprinted with permission of Bud Williams and *The Stockman Grass Farmer*.

