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Horse Powered: Why Work with Horses ?

We could and do run events without working with animal partners. So why have horses as a key element in some events ?

Horses are prey animals. They are therefore extremely vigilant as to any threat to their well-being. They are tuned into their environment and have enormous sensory inputs to enable them to detect any threats. Horses see 340° round them. There are small blind spots immediately behind and immediately in front, below and above them. Carol will be explaining more about this importance of remembering this when we meet.

Horses' eyes, like their ears, can function independently. They have a huge range of monocular vision, so horses can scan an enormous field. Their eyes can work together bifocal vision, like humans. Horses will detect the unfamiliar and will, like many people, react first and think later. This means they may 'spook' at something we cannot see or that we do see, but know is harmless. Something unfamiliar to the horse, however innocuous to us, could be dangerous to them. As a prey animal the main question in life is will it eat me or not ? The main goal is not being eaten. The important driver for the horse is to react and live to see another day. It's a *modus operandi* that has served them well.

Horses are said to have the fastest reaction time of any animal - prey or predator. Prey animals have to be quick to evade capture and so, certain death. A reaction for a horse may be to run or to kick out if they feel threatened. Horses can run faster than any other animal. They are 7' long and say 5' high at their highest point (the withers). They are around 1000 lbs. So thinking about such a big animal being quick reacting is important.

Horses have super sensory organs and can over great distances detect smells, sounds and movement which may signify a threat.

As a prey animal horses don't want to feel trapped or captured. These are feelings that would extend to things that we human, and predator animals, want to do with horses. For example, we like to put a halter on them to lead them, to clean out and look after their hooves, and in doing hoof care we take hold of one of their legs, a leg that they need for a fast get away. We want to put tack on them so that we can ride them.

Again it is worth thinking about the sorts of things that we want to do to horses and the ways in which we invade their space to do these things.

After survival, horses are keen to maximize their physical and emotional comfort and this contributes to their desire to live co-operatively with each other. An acceptance of a pecking order and being able to get on with eating, grooming and moving around maximizes their feel good factor and conserves energy they may need to ward off a threat. They are not continually jostling for pole position.

Hayes, describes horses as "other centered" aware and tuned into their environment and other horses, forever reading what is going on around them. He describes people as "self-centered" seeing the world the way he or she sees it¹.

Horses survive by being observant of their environment. That includes monitoring the intentions, the energy and communications of other horses and those around them. This includes us humans. Horses to survive need to be and are very adept readers of what others communicate.

This brings us to why we work with horses. People, human animals, have become very preoccupied by our capacity for spoken and written language. This leads some to think that we are superior to and very different to other animals. We do not appreciate our similarities and the fact that so much of what we communicate is done so energetically and through body language. While we may have dialed down our conscious capacity to read one another's body language and our awareness of the information and messages we are telegraphing nonverbally, horses have not. Pretty much everything a horse wants to say is conveyed through body language. As a prey animal

¹ Tim Hayes, 2015, *Riding Home: The Power of Horses to Heal*, St Martin's Press, New York.

vocalizations would not be at the forefront of verbal communications as it would give away location.

Humans verbalize and this is a language of the brain. But there is much else that a human thinks and feels which is continuously conveyed through our bodies.

Horses react to what we give out or give off. For horses, the adage of fake it till you make it will not work. In being with horses we have to be more consistent and coherent in what we are projecting and communicating. A come here pretty horse overlaid on inner feelings of anger or disgust are incoherent and the horse will not come.

Horses are therefore an effective mirror of what is actually going on within a human. Does a human emanate trustworthiness, confidence, dependability or is the person at conflict, uncertain, fearful and therefore not to be trusted ?

Horses are integrated into what we are offering. The contact with horses is optional and will be ground-based only.

For people with prior horse experience we ask that you still follow Apple Creek's guidance and undertake only the exercises that are outlined.

Everyone's well-being and safety is a priority. To that end we require everyone:

- to pay attention to Carol Frick's safety instructions at the beginning of the event and given as needed throughout the event.
- to respect the rules of the working ranch and stables
- to be appropriately attired with close toed shoes or boots, long pants, long sleeved tops and to not wear jewelry, scarves and loose clothing. Wear layers as we will be outside for the whole event.

We will not work with anyone arriving intoxicated.

There is a strict no smoking policy at the ranch.

Location: Apple Creek Training and Lesson Center, 1807 South Gravenstein Highway, Sebastopol, 95472

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