

Weiterbildung

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Von Pferden lernen Learning With Horses

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Management Training with Horses: How to Leave an Impression

Well, blow me down!

When horses meet people they react to the person's behavior immediately and without reflection. If the person puts on an act, or is insecure, the horse will not trust him/her. These instincts horses have and their way of communicating can be used to train people's soft skills. These skills can only be learned through experience.



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Surprising and, at least from the view of the rider, unusual and completely new things are happening in riding halls, in riding

arenas and paddocks. A group of people in casual clothes looking focused, but without the normal recognizable outfit of a rider, such as riding boots, riding crop, and riding pants, observe a group of horses, take notes, and discuss intensely. Individual people lead horses through the arena, stand with them in a small square marked-off with barrier tape, send one or several horses in a circle with a gesture or a small flag or build whole parcours with a selection of colorful plastic utensils. Horses and people interact or sometimes they don't. It is hard to gauge what the horses think of all this. The people don't use any kind of coercive tools. Nevertheless, the quadrupeds face them and react. In some situations they even act. They walk away from one person and approach another, start their own games with the different utensils or show the entire range of behaviour between fun, interest, and boredom. The show takes one to three days and so far, has almost never failed to impress the participating bipeds.

The people usually belong to the manager subspecies, while the participating horses are representatives of any number of breeds, from an Island pony to a Warmblood, from a Friesian to an Arabian. Management Training with Horses is the topic at hand. Those involved in this type of training talk of personal and employee development, offering seminars for change management or individual, equine-assisted coaching. Their most important tools are horses. In an ideal case, these quadrupeds live together in a herd and don't stand in separate boxes, as is still common in riding stables. Observing a herd that works well as

a team, makes things even more exciting. Horses, which are allowed to express their genetically programmed social structure are usually more balanced, more inclined to communicate and also more confident.

In 2004, the providers of "Horse Assisted Training" have united under the EAHA banner, European Association for Horse Assisted Education. This is by no means an exotic variant of management training, but a comprehensive concept with quality standards, licensing, and Train-the-Trainer offers. There is quite a selection in the way of literature and studies conducted as part of master theses. The German pioneer Horse-dream, active on an international level nowadays, was founded in 1998 and has 31 partners in Germany. There are well-established providers in Poland, Spain, England, France, Italy, among others, which work with ten to 50 companies and 100 to 500 participants, per year. The list of participants looks like a representative cross-section the respective countries' economies.

Excursion 1: Man and Horse

Horse and man's mutual journey started relatively late, approx. 6000 years ago where the horse was a domesticated animal. During this time, man not only shaped the horse according to his needs, physically, but also used selection based on friendliness towards humans and the ability to be a companion. For a long period of human history the skilled handling of horses was virtually a career requirement in many cultures. Before the car was introduced practically every statesman, prince, or commander had to be able to safely handle a horse in all situations from day-to-day life to warfare.

Our ancestors for whom handling horses was part of their everyday lives, generally knew that the training of a rider was a personality test. Next to physical fitness, the secure handling of a more or less temperamental package of muscles, weighing approx. 500 to 800 kilo, requires mental strength and confidence. The controlled interaction is only possible, because man and horse are programmed to live in a social network with hierarchical structure and to cooperate with members of the same species. Communication even works across species' borders, due to these commonalities.

Under natural conditions, the horse herd follows a leader who is respected based on its skills as a leader, but it has to prove its ability and defend its position every day. All other members of the herd find their place in the hierarchy below, which changes and is not always consistent. Horse A dominates horse B through claiming space and food first. B dominates C, C dominates D, but D eventually asserts himself against A. It is possible for two horses to have a close friendship. At the same time, however, the question who dominates who is always decided. Even though horses cannot be regarded as having great intellectual powers, the range of their character traits and the variations of the interactions amongst themselves - in other words, their social structure - are comparable to that of humans. Pure physical strength and size play a secondary role here and only decide the hierarchy of the lower ranks. A dominant animal with a strong character hardly ever needs to bite and kick. It shows its strength through its body language.

Excursion 2: The Encounter

When man and horse meet, the horse will make its judgment within seconds, about who it is facing and how to classify that person. The same thing happens when humans meet. Looks, posture, facial expressions, motion sequence; with this information we form a mental image of the person in front of us, in the blink of an eye. This image determines the interaction between two people. There are some important differences, however. Humans can be impressed by social status symbols, horses lack any understanding of this concept – the Armani suit and the Rolex don't impress. Horses react only to body language in all its forms, among themselves and in their relationships with humans.



This means they cut to the chase. Horses are neither polite nor considerate, but direct, spontaneous and, in interacting socially, focus on constantly improving their ranking, rather than losing it. They always react to the current situation, even if they could include past experiences concerning the other party. Horses just instinctively mirror human behavior without reflecting on it. They are willing to regard the person in front of them as a member of their species higher up in the hierarchy if they feel s/he qualifies for this role. If the human is insecure or puts on an act, the response is immediate. The horse listens to its instincts and won't trust the biped. It may walk away or take over and try to dominate the human. The range of possible reactions is wide and varies with the "attitude" of the horse. It is always noticeable, however.

Learning from Horses?

Today, when horses are used in training people, their way of communicating with humans, is utilized. Humans don't need horses to teach them that there is a hierarchy among them. Both species are aware of this at

all times. However, observing the social structure of the herd with its complex structures and role allocations makes the observers feel as if they are watching a mirror image of their own environment. Horses are a catalyst or a medium and give you unvarnished feedback, as long as you are willing to pay attention to the strong and subtle signals. During direct confrontation, where human and horse are expected to solve a problem as a team, an additional aspect comes to the foreground: The direct and blunt reaction in combination with impressive strength and size. If the horse does not feel like it, a human will not move it by pulling on a rope, pushing it, saying “please”, being disappointed, sad, friendly or angry. If the human claims the role of the leader, s/he should be able and willing to embody this claim. The horse will let the human know whether s/he is embodying this position right now, as part of this specific interaction with a certain being, under the current framework conditions. Here, the overall situation is examined. Someone who has learned how to utilize certain body language skills from a communications trainer will quickly be disappointed if the individual elements don't form a new, convincing overall picture.

Trainings with horses are therefore not about horses, but about people. The advertisements of the different providers occasionally say that horses can recognize minimal deviations down to the fraction of a millimeter in the posture or facial expression of a human. This is not the crucial point, however. Humans too, recognize and interpret (unconsciously for the most part) minute changes in facial expressions or posture, such as the lowering of a corner of the mouth, the barely visible raising of an eyebrow, a blink of the eyelids or the posture of a dialogue partner. However, they don't feed these impressions back without reflection. People are skilled at filtering the assessments of the person in front of them, according to their own interests and directing them in a “socially appropriate way”, i.e. with consideration of their own position and that of the other person within the hierarchy. The horse, on the other hand, is like a coach who doesn't consider the feelings of its coachee at all. As one provider puts it: “The horse is a very present being, very real, living always in the here and now. That makes people, working with horses in horse assisted seminars, learn about being 100 percent present, responsibility, self confi-

dence, awareness, and all that is necessary to develop leadership skills.”

Soft Skills and Leadership Skills

“Horses see our inner images” is a central statement by Linda Tellington-Jones, a world-famous horse expert. It is not entirely clear how this happens exactly and it certainly does not mean that horses or other animals have supernatural abilities. They don't “see” these images, but are aware of the mental state of another horse or of a human being, within seconds. With this ability they sensitize humans to become aware of these signals as well. They demand presence, because they are focused on the moment, with their entire awareness. A horse is incapable of processing opinions and views of the past, expectations of the future and the awareness of the current situation, at the same time, intellectually. Humans, on the other hand, evaluate and mix all three levels and thereby often lose the ability to be present without prejudice and to focus on the moment. The higher intellectual performance also blurs focused awareness. Humans constantly mix up facts and assessments, expectations and reasons for their own actions.

This might not be too dramatic in a predictable environment. However, we don't live in a predictable economic environment. Financial experts were neither able to predict the Lehmann bust of 2008 and its consequences for the world economy, nor is anyone capable of recognizing the global effects of national debt and rescue packages for the coming years. Political upheavals are just as impossible to calculate as is the emergence of new technologies. In “The Black Swan – The Impact of the Highly Improbable”, Nassim Taleb deals with the impossibility of predicting and controlling developments. “We have a paradox. Not only have forecasters generally failed dismally to foresee the drastic changes brought about by unpredictable discoveries, but incremental change has turned out to be generally slower than forecasters expected. When a new technology emerges, we either grossly underestimate or severely overestimate its importance.” Despite all planning, the development of a business process cannot be predicted. The same is true of the economic and social framework conditions in which it takes place.

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In an environment that cannot be controlled and can only be predicted in a very limited way, the best solution is to improve the awareness of reality. To understand a situation, to evaluate the possible courses of action without prejudice, and to include people in decisions and to convince them, is ultimately leadership and the sum of what we call Soft Skills. Steve Jobs summarized realizations from his personal life story at a presentation for students in Stanford. "You can't connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect the dots looking backwards. ...Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow know what you truly want to become."

A Paradox Task

How do you learn Soft Skills and leadership skills? The answer to this question can be found in several meters of literature on the topic of leadership. However, skills are not developed by reading, but by acting and experiencing. If abstract knowledge improved the leadership skills and Soft Skills of humans, a good library would be all we need. The success of seminars with an eloquent or even charismatic trainer are quite limited, too. A manager once described it something like this: "When we send executives or employees to a classical seminar we might have three people who take something from it and can apply some of it. The rest think the seminar was great but have a rather vague idea of the consequences it could have, and within ten days the content is forgotten. Someone who has faced a horse

however, will remember the feelings the horse's reactions triggered, even after months. He or she has experienced something and will react to this experience."

It is important to reach a level of personal experience to trigger an accepted and desired, individual learning process. A corporate client said: "To work with horses that can't understand the human spoken word shows you more clearly the difference between what is said and what is meant. So it makes me look at myself to change my attitude when necessary in any given situation." He summarized the benefits of the training this way: "We awake the readiness of our employees with leadership responsibilities to move and to change their personal style of leadership by themselves" (presentation of a client at the Yearly Conference of the EAHAE 2011). The training with horses provides a chance for personal development.

Conclusion:

The development of personal competencies demands a working method that goes beyond imparting knowledge. Usually, a lack of knowledge is not the problem. To use horses as coaches has proven to be a practical method to strengthen people's self-awareness and readiness to learn. This shifts the learning process from the company to the individual. Such training will only be successful in the long run, if this development is continued in the daily work routine. This requires an open environment that provides the freedom for these competencies to develop.

horsedream.de



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Interview with Fritz Hendrich, Consultant and Trainer for Executives

Management with Ethics and a Conscience

Soft Skills don't always have it easy. In many companies they aren't paid more than mere lip service. However, we need executives who think holistically. Apart from their know-how regarding optimization of benefits and profits, they should focus on values that are compatible with ethics and their conscience. Such abilities should be trained during their education.

Dr. Dr. Fritz Hendrich, lawyer and economist, consultant for 30 years, trainer and coach for executives in Europe and the United States, has taught corporate management at universities in Graz, Linz, Krems, Brügge, and St. Gallen.

Weiterbildung: Soft Skills, social competencies, leadership skills, key qualifications, emotional intelligence; many words for things that are hard to measure objectively. Wouldn't you agree?

Fritz Hendrich: The objective measurement is an illusion anyway, and especially in the field of education, because the formulation of the measurement criteria and the interpretation of the results are subjective and intentionally distorted. For the job-related field you can add the influence of superiors, colleagues, working atmosphere, company success, etc., which interact with the qualities you mentioned and influence their use and development, and therefore their evaluation. I believe the problem lies in our need to, and belief in, measuring and quantifying everything. These qualities can be experienced in a highly subjective way and the observer should stand by his or her subjectivity and include it in his or her highly personal feedback. It is especially important to increase the attentiveness and to strengthen and refine people's perceptive abilities, rather than to believe we have to force them into 360 degree feedback assessments and similar crutches, for lack of perception, in measurements to two decimal points.

Weiterbildung: Which term do you favor? Or are we talking about completely different things?

Fritz Hendrich: I see them as different terms that correspond with each other:

Soft Skills is what I call those skills necessary in

the occupational field, which lie outside of professional competence. The big problem with this is the belittling effect of the word "soft", since it, or lack thereof, can make for a rather hard landing...

For me, social competencies are abilities and also tools for constructive interaction with fellow human beings, in all areas of life.

Leadership competence is comprised of organizational and strategic abilities on the one hand and social competencies in the area of personnel management (among others, empathy and assertiveness, trust and respect) on the other. Add to this, a sufficient degree of preferably neurosis-free self-esteem, balanced by self-criticism and self-awareness. Emotional intelligence and social competency are therefore, among other things, essential components of leadership competency.

The professional, emotional, and social competencies are the key qualifications for the respective job description, and therefore can only be defined for each job, individually.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to deal intelligently with emotions. In order to do this, I have to first be able to be aware of them in an honest fashion; only then can I direct them, based on the situation. It is the inwardly-focused requirement for the social competency, directed at the world around us.

Weiterbildung: How about Soft Skills and Leadership Competency in business?

Fritz Hendrich: They suffer from the fact that they aren't taken all that seriously, due to their belittling name. "Soft" sounds like softie, wimp, and someone who remembers wedding anniversaries. In grand speeches everyone commits enthusiastically to their importance, but if you look at the emphasis given to them on training schedules at universities or other institutions you can see, however, that this is mostly lip service. After all, for tough men only "hard facts" count. This is why I am hoping that the emancipation of women in business will improve soft skills and their standing. In part, I see this happening already.

Weiterbildung: You have written a book called: "The Four Energies of Leadership – leading people with the power of the elements". Those are fire, water, air, and earth. Are we headed for esotericism here?

Fritz Hendrich: No, not at all. Our thinking, remembering, comprehending takes place in the form of images. Such graphic metaphors, like we use them in language (when "the roof is on fire", or the "hothead" or "still, deep water" person acts, or the "airhead" is grounded by the "rock-solid" person), are therefore the ideal structure for understanding leadership tasks and behavior. Thinking in images is such a valuable technique that we should employ it not only in creativity and memory training. In comprehending management and leadership, these images also stimulate our neglected right brain. When they speak of holistic management today, then I think that, as a minimum, the whole brain has to be engaged, i.e. both the left and the right cerebral hemispheres. This book is an incentive and a manual for the owner and user of the two cerebral hemispheres.

Weiterbildung: How does one acquire Soft Skills? If you ask executives, you get the impression they simply develop during everyday business practice.

Fritz Hendrich: We develop Soft Skills during the process of our socialization, starting the first day of our life. They are further formed or deformed as part of our daily life experience. It is possible to correct such forming or deforming in trainings, as is the learning and experiencing of tools and basic laws. These are as important for resolving conflicts in your social environment as the law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics are for the technician. During our last year

at high school we learn how to calculate which volume is created, when a hyperbola rotates around the x-axis and intersects with the tangent of a circle; something you really need in everyday life, right? But when the sales manager refuses to deal with the production manager and the whole company goes into a tail-spin, we lack the knowledge and tools to deal with the situation. This has to be relearned and that is why it is important to learn Soft Skills.

Weiterbildung: Can't we simply define Soft Skills as life and professional experience?

Fritz Hendrich: They are skills that can be developed through life and professional experience, but not in and of themselves, in the best way. The topic and benefit of meaningful trainings is to become aware of the past development and to shape that of the future.

Weiterbildung: How does Social Media change Soft Skills and on which level does that happen?

Fritz Hendrich: The excess amount of information and virtual contacts resulting from Social Media can lead to even less willingness and ability to directly communicate on a personal level. Moreover, the new media weaken Soft Skills in the most alarming fashion: You send an email to your colleague next door, rather than talk to him. The personal contact with clients is replaced by a CRM software tool (Customer Relationship Management). The appraisal interview is degraded to ticking off check lists with school grades. To avoid the face-to-face confrontation, even text messages and e-mails are used for layoffs. The band STS touched on this in their song: "...and it's getting cold and even colder, and I am becoming more hardened and older..." I sometimes have the suspicion that all the talk about global warming is only a ploy of a large world-wide conspiracy that wants to distract from the emotional cooling inside corporations...Should I take the time to write another book, it will be the satirical novel "Global Cooling". If I was anywhere as good as Umberto Eco in this genre I would already be working on it.

Weiterbildung: You also worked in the area of Management Training with Horses. What do we need the quadrupeds for?

Fritz Hendrich: Unvarnished, immediate feedback, free from tactics and calculation is something that is

not possible in communication between humans and probably not even desirable, given that it can be upsetting and hurtful or hurt your career. Horses provide the mirror in this often demanded Here And Now and a learning environment for a variety of leadership and communication qualities, such as security, credibility, the ability to trust, assertiveness, respect, etc. As a prerequisite for honest self-awareness, of course, you have to be willing to look into the mirror. Without a doubt, it is important to be very thorough and have high standards when choosing competent training providers in this area.

Weiterbildung: "Bankster" is a new cuss word for an economic elite that does business only to fill its own pockets. How can we guarantee the responsible acting of management elites?

Fritz Hendrich: First of all, by becoming more alert and less compromising when dealing with any kind of corruption and holding the culprits and enablers responsible everywhere. In this context, I would like to keep the term corruption as broad as possible, to include all the legal corruption: Those managers that greedily get rich all have contracts, through which someone makes their behavior possible, usually for the satisfaction of some mutual interest. We don't need to write into law profitable but morally acceptable rules for balancing performance and remuneration in management. To this end, it is necessary that politics stops being held hostage to the banks and corporations. It is simply disgusting, when the those who cause losses in the bil-

lions reward themselves with a salary that is several hundred times higher than that of their employees, then take a golden handshake worth millions, and let the tax payer fix the damage. Performance, risk, accountability, and remuneration are completely disconnected in such a scenario. However, there are supervisory bodies and lawmakers who make this kind of practice entirely legal!

Weiterbildung: What can be done as early as during the training of future specialists and leaders to develop Soft Skills and leadership qualities? Is the training at universities even suitable for something like this, today?

Fritz Hendrich: At most of the universities it isn't. Just like the bankers control the politicians, most universities are controlled by financial technicians who also dominate the curricula. With their blind focus on results and numbers they teach, at least in an implied way, that it is very easy to have a clear conscience: Simply don't use it. In comparison to lectures for financial and controlling techniques, Social skills and business ethics are basically non-existent. Future managers require an education system that does not only teach techniques for optimizing benefits and profits, but also a course of study that regards ethics and conscience as values that are to be taught and exemplified. This is where we need to start pulling the plug on the lie that wants to sell us the cardinal sin of greed as a virtue of commercial cleverness.

The interview was conducted by Charlotte Venema

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