**"Our horses attention or the lack of it and the horses willingness and motivation to learn/work with us"**

Even if we have all the tools to teach our horses clear aids, are light, thoughtful, careful and considerate but if we dont have his full attetion on us we dont get anywhere in the training. It can even turn dangerous for us if our equine partner decides to ignore us and wants to take charge. Loss of attention can have many forms from trying to run off or over top of us to to just focusing on something else with pricked ears and trying to look at something out of ther corner of the eye. the horses **willingness** to want to work with us and wanting to actively try to figure out what it is we are asking of him is closely linked to the **attention** he gives us as well as his **level of motivation.**

**How does the ideal interaction with our horses look like?**

Our horse greets us with ears pricked and keen interest, even comes walking up to be haltered. On the ground he is respectful and minds our space, leads with a soft feel on the lead, it is easy to move all his body parts off a light feel or just by him minding the personal space/air bubble between us, his attitude is pleasant, he is relaxed and trusting and allows us to touch him everywere. His expression/eye is soft.

Under saddle we have a light connection on the reins, he stays on track, is responsive and light to our leg/seat and rein aids, he stretches his topline when asked with active gaits or comes in hand with more balance, the gaits are comfortable to sit and ride, his ears check in backwards with us often, we can feel him tryig when we add new requests/exercises.

**Some forms of loss of attention:**

**mild**: trying to look at something out of the corner of the eye, a small bracing of the neck for example but is still for the most part participating and responding to aids and requests, relaxation can be compromised

**medium**: turning head towards something and away from us or into us, invading our personal space for example crowding us with his shoulders, drifting towards the gate or home, calling out to other horses, heavy/unresponsive to usually light aids, stiffening and tightening of muscles, bracing the jaw/neck/back/topline

**severe**: pushing/ bumping into us, stepping on our feet, head high up and alert with pricked ears, dragon blowig nose and wide eyes, calling to other horses and trying to get away from us to the horses, refusing to go forward, ignoring/unresponsive to our aids and requests, strong bracing of muslces to the point where horse is going to bolt, buck or rear to take charge

**Possible causes**:

\*rider not having full attention on horse either, distacted in his mind and not tuned into horse, on the phone or talking to others, \*spooky unknown objects and places, \*weather ( rain, wind, hail, thunderstorm), \*horse is bored maybe under stimulated (too much routine), \*herd bound, other horses leaving or calling \*lack of leadership and trust in rider, disrespect \*health issues (saddle fit, ulcers, not feeling well, soreness in body, lameness, eye sight issues, sore feet), \*unfamiliar noises, \*unknown to human 'equine ghosts', \*sudden movements, \*temperament (some horses distract easy while others focus better), \*stallions, mares in heat, \*stress/anxiety about something, horse overwhelmed/ overfaced

**what can we do**:

-in general:

\*analyzing situation (why did horse loose attention),\* keep our focus on horse 100% when asking for things and even in break if called for, \* being on top of health issues (teeth, saddle fit, hoof balance, tight muslces, pain, restricted vision)\*taking charge and being the leader, being a calm, fair and interesting leader, horse will look to us for comfort and trust that we take care of him in spooky situations and keep him safe \*praise and show enthusiasm often for things well done and any try from the horse's side to motivate horse, \*being understanding withouth making excuses (age, circumstances, time of the day, consider physical limitiations, difficult conformation) ,\* being resonable and keeping demands realistic for the situation (hailstorm, other horses runing close by)\*establish relaxation (relax mouth, moving quarters and or shoulders, neck extension with contact)\*keep horse motivated by keeping time together interesting and with training variations

-for mild/medium attention loss:

\*relaxing the jaw \*relaxing with neck extension especially if horse comes above bit, \*lateral bend in neck, \*poll flexion, asking the horse to be in hand \*keeping horse busy (no time time to be distracted and spook),\*counter bending turns quickly all over the arena \*riding figures and transitions, small circles, fig 8s and small serpentines, \*lateral work, \*voice, talking to horse, \*tug on halter or demi arret on reins if he wants to look or turn away from us, \*ignoring spooky thing and focusing on a solid and understood exercise for horse, \*stop and let horse have a look once but then next time around ask horse to stay with you and ignore whatever got his attention, \*reassuring horse, \* flag on the ground to reestablish personal space/boundaries,

-severe attention loss:

\*shoulder in circle for rearing, loss of forward reaction to leg due to a strong distraction, \*counter bending turns quickly all over when loosing mental focus, \*shoulder in past spooky object, \*spiraling in to slow, \*one rein stop as emergency stop,\* flag on the ground to reestablish personal space \*circling or serpentines towards spooky object \*a one time quick within 3 seconds of the incident and sharp aid with whip/horsemanship stick might be called for to reprimand for unwanted pushy behavior especially on the ground (stepping on us, pushing into us or pushing us over, we should be more important than most spooky objects or distractants and our safety is priority)

**what we should avoid**:

\*getting emotional and angry/frustrated,\* being harsh with aids, always offer the good deal fist with a light aid then increase intensity of aid sometimes quite fast to stay safe \*raising voice with emotion, \*giving up and giving in teaches horse that distraction can mean a way out and less work, \*trying to force something, \*blaming the horse, \*taking it personal, \*wanting to accomplish too much, \*being inflexible with our training plan

**What motivates/makes a horse want to work for and with us**:

\*trust in person, \*respect for person, \*knowing person is predictable with aids and demands, \*breaks and positive rewards (treats for some, praise, touch, break), \*recognizing any try and rewarding it, \*appreciation and enthusiasm for their try, \* truly caring and loving them, \*person is a fair and sure leader, \*good timing, \*finding and working within horses limits and making them feel like they are succeeding, \*respecting their likes and dislikes, \*recognizing their personalities and tailoring the training to best motivate them \*variety in training, avoiding same routine all the time \*focus on horses strong points not weaknesses

**Horses Temperament and Character traits to consider**

**Temperament**: born with these traits which most likely wont change much

\*active (moves a lot doesnt like to stand still) \*slow (relaxed type, seldom becomes hectic) \*intelligent (smart, learns quick) \*insecure (reacts irritated or frightened to small requests) \*industrious (wants to do the right thing, can concentrate easily, likes to keep busy)

**Character traits**: depends on experiences horses make, can be changed with training and education

\*reliable (does what we ask of the horse, good behaviour, safe and steady) \*compliant (gives in easy, doesnt want to fight to defend himself, submissive) \*dominant (mentally stable and strong, gets his way with other horses) \*willful (doesnt give in easy, not very kooperative) \*careful (worries easily, fearful, avoids risks) \*excentric (excessive behaviour, stereotypical behaviour) \*aggressive (causes pain to others, cause of wrong training methods or fear)

**How horses learn for different Temperaments and Charakters**

\***Social learning**, watching other horses do something and getting rewarded for it (going into trailer), good for intelligent, reliable and compliant horses

\***Habituation**, horse gets used to something on his own without human for example a tarp in his paddock, trailer with food, in training with human the irritation has to be repeated until the horse doesnt react to it anymore, good for insecure and exzentric horses

\***classical conditioning**, setting up a situation where horse will likely show the desired response (tailer with food in it), waiting for horse to show desired behaviour on his own and then rewarding it, good for active, intelligent, exzentric, reliable, careful aggressive from fear horses

\***operant conditioning** (is a type of learning where behavior is controlled by consequences. Key concepts in operant conditioning are positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement) human actively gets the horse to do what he wants and rewards horse by taking pressure away and or giving a treat, horses dont always do requests willingly this way, not as motivating for some horses as it wasnt really their idea, good for slow, intelligent, active, reliable, willful, dominant and aggressive from wrong training

**A few possible Scenarios**:

\*rearing- shoulder in on circle with lateral bend - finding cause, checking saddle fit , riders aids, horses understanding of what we want, lightness to forward leg aids

\*spooking from a corner in arena - for mild spook, going by with lateral flexion away, -more reactive spook, bolting possibly, turning towards and parallel to corner and serpentines back and forth parallel to spooky object (many changes of direction) and gradually get closer, can use circles to get closer and closer too, putting food in corner and letting horse eat there, following another horse

\*looking around being distracted, coming above bit -lateral flexion, possibly poll flexion and neck extension, keeping horse busy, for example many counter bending turns all over, small serpentines changeing direction often with changeing bend to inside with opening inside rein every time, checking health/saddle issues that could cause a horse to act distraced and uncomfortable

\*bracing/tensing in body -lateral flexion, sh in on circle (attention, reaction to ins leg, suppling lumbar area), lateral work or counter bending turns to keep busy, small circles or serpentines, following a calm horse (trailride)

\*bad attitude for example pining ears - repeating exercise or transition until attitude is more pleasant, ruling out pain and saddle fit, enthusiastic reward and treat for good attitude and try

\*on ground barging into us, stepping on us, pushing us over -lack of respect for our personal space especially if horse had the option of other routes, -work with flag and moving all body parts separately away from us, sending horse away and circling with changeing direction often with lead and rope halter