

Is It Enough To Train The Physical Body?

Well, the short answer here is no! There are many other factors to consider than just the physical body. The mind is a much bigger picture to focus on, emotions, trauma, past history and experiences good or bad are stored here. The mind controls the physical state and the physical state controls the mind. So it's extremely important to consider this during the training process and the horses day to day living.

The physical body is the road map to the past and here we see the consequences of many situations or problems. Tackling these issues directly is not enough to free the horse from what is stored. In many cases the horse may perform in the physical body but be completely shut down in the mind. In worst case scenarios shutting down of both may occur leading to many behavioural issues and more physical and mental problems.

So how do we influence the mind? Seeing, listening, feeling and understanding is the key. This means noticing the tiniest of signals when we are with our horses. Having an understanding of sympathetic and para-sympathetic systems and polyvagal theory is also the key (A topic I'll discuss separately).

Our horses learn best when in a relaxed energetic state. Let's take an example - if a horse is in flight/fight mode it's ability to learn/relax and perform are inhibited by the overriding instinct to take flight or fight. Being able to influence and comprehend what state the horses in, in any given time can be the difference between productive training in a relaxed state where the horse can learn or a session that is tense/explosive or even completely shut down.

Understanding the horses physical and mental state and being able to influence or even change it requires us as humans to leave judgement, emotion and expectation aside (horses read these like a book). Getting involved in the horses story of the past, it's behaviours and reactions isn't helpful in writing the future.

Noticing the flick of an ear, tensing of a muscle, shallowing of breath, increased heart rate, loss of attention, swish of a tail are all very important in understanding how the horse is actually feeling not just in its body but in its mind. Your response to this can mean the difference between the situation escalating or being defused and the horse feeling confident in your company or on edge and nervous. It's our responsibility as humans to help our horses find comfort both in their physical and mental state.