

Hello and welcome to the Horsefulness Training Podcast. I'm Karine Vandendorre, I'm a professional horse trainer and instructor, founder of Horsefulness Training and creator of the online Horsefulness Training Programs.

In this third episode of the Horsefulness Training Podcast I'm going to talk about Feel and Timing. I'll explain to you what feel and timing is and I'm going to answer a question that people ask me a lot: namely: how can I develop better feel and timing?

I'm also going to reveal the winner of the Free membership to the Horsefulness Liberty Training Program.

But first, let's talk about feel and timing!

Are you ready?

(music)

So, this podcast episode is about Feel and Timing.

I chose this topic because I often get questions about it, people ask me: how can I develop better feel? Or how can I develop better timing?

But most of the time people ask me: how can I develop my feel AND timing?

And in fact, this is correct, because Feel and Timing, they always go together! Without feel, you can't have good timing! So to improve your timing, you have to improve your feel and then your timing will automatically become better!

Good timing is often described as the ability to give and release pressure at the right moment. But timing, for me, is much more than that.

It's about every kind of communication and contact you can possibly have with your horse: so not only physical communication, but also mental communication, AND energetic communication. It's not only about giving and releasing pressure, or how I prefer to call it: physical and driving aids.

For me: good timing is the ability to communicate what you want to communicate on the right moment. Whether you are communicating only on the energetic level or you are also communicating on the mental and physical level.

That can even be when only stroking your horse: feeling when it is the best moment to stroke your horse, when your horse wants it and when not for example. How long to stroke your horse, and know when to stop

For this and for all other kinds of communication, so to know when you do something, when you ask something, when you reward or when you ask again, you need one thing, and that is
FEEL

So, when someone asks me: how can I improve my timing, my answer is always the same: to improve your timing, you don't have to work on your timing, you just have to find your feel! So forget about your timing, let it go, just work on your feel and your timing will automatically be fine!

But, what exactly is feel ?

For me, feel is the ability to feel towards the horse.

It's possible to be in contact with the horse, but it's also possible to be "out of contact with the horse".

If you are able to feel towards the horse and the horse can therefore also feel towards you, then you are "in contact". If that is not the case, if you are not able to feel towards the horse then you are "out of contact".

When you feel towards the horse, you are working with feel, and then you will be able to see and feel better what your horse does. I'll give you an example, something that comes to mind about this.

One day I was teaching circle work to a student and her horse. The horse, whose name was Polac, refused to go for a trot and also when I tried he refused. Suddenly I realized that I was totally not in contact with the horse, because during the lesson I had put all my focus on my student and how she gave the aids, and moved and when I started working with polac I was still focused on the owner, talking to her about her horse.

The moment I became aware of that, I stopped talking and started feeling towards Polac more and made real contact with him, energetic as well as mental and physical. And it was only then I started noticing that there was something wrong with his shoulder. It was not that the horse was limping or

something else that was very clear, it was just kind of a very tiny tensed look in that region. It was so little, it was almost invisible, but after cultivating more feel and feeling towards Polac I could notice better.

So we stopped the lesson, the owner went home with Polac and let him check by the vet. She e-mailed me a few days later to say that her horse had a beginning injury in his shoulder.

So, this story shows, that when you feel towards the horse, you can see much better how your horse moves, you can see little tensions or other things that otherwise are invisible to your eye.

But that's not the only thing: you also feel better how your horse moves, for example when you are in the saddle. Riding is body to body contact and you need feel to be able to use your body in a friendly and clear manner, that will enable you to communicate better.

This is also the case when you use your hands when touching your horse, only when you touch with feel, your horse will like your touch and be able to relax under your touch. Makes sense? (korte pause)

When you work with feel you will also feel and know much better what your horse truly needs and wants.

It happens a lot, that when I work with a horse of a student, to show something, the student asks me how it comes that the horse immediately reacts better.

Well, that's because when I work with a horse, the first thing I do is feeling towards the horse and going into the contact with the horse, whether that's in liberty, or during groundwork or riding.

When I go into the contact by feeling towards the horse, I also open myself up to the horse and then the horse can respond by feeling towards me too and only then a lot of information can be exchanged between me and the horse.

I then quickly feel what it is that the horse needs. I feel if the horse needs a calmer energy or a more active energy, and then I generate that energy and the horse responds by being less or more energetic too and then the exercises goes much better. Or I feel the horse needs a break or wants to do something else.

It's my intuition that kicks in, when working with feel, and that is not special, everybody has intuition and everybody can use his intuition. But to be able to

tap into your higher knowing you have to find your feel first. And don't worry, it might seem difficult, but believe me, you can do it too!

Your intuition will also let you know how your horse feels deep inside.

Let me tell you a story: (korte pause)

one day there was a woman coming to me for a lesson with her horse. Her horse was a beautiful Arabian mare, chestnut colour, beautiful big eyes and full of energy. When she let her mare run free in the paddock she was trotting and cantering and she snorted and held her head high to see my horses who were grazing far away in the field.

At first sight it was a perfectly normal, energetic and joyful horse. But then I started working with her in Liberty, and while working with her I started feeling towards her more and more until I felt this energetic connection taking place. Then suddenly it hit me out of the blue: this unbearable feeling of loneliness, this deep uncontrollable sadness. What was this??

I turned towards the owner of the horse, a young woman, and asked her: what is the name of your horse? She pulled up her shoulders, so I asked her again, because I thought she hadn't understood what I asked, so again I said: what is the name of your horse? and she replied: She has no name, when I call her I just say horse.

Now to be honest, I never met someone who called his horse just horse. And I don't know how you feel about this, but to me it feels as if the horse is only an object.

So I asked her why she didn't have a name, but the woman pulled up her shoulders again. She started telling me about the problem she had, that she couldn't catch her horse in the field, and therefore they decided to take her out of a herd of horses, in which her best friend, a young gelding was also, and that now she lived alone in a field where she couldn't see her friends anymore. That was the only way she could catch her horse but the problem now was that her horse couldn't stand still and so on and so on...

When I asked her how much time she spent with her horse, she told me she was a very busy person and only saw her horse once or twice a month.

So it's not difficult to understand that this feeling of loneliness and deep sadness was a feeling that I picked up from the horse, a feeling that came to me because I could feel towards the horse and I opened up towards the horse so she could open up to me to and let me know how she felt deep inside.

If only her owner could do that to I thought, so I tried to help her with that, but I know when she left with the horse, after this first session, it was also our last, because when she left she told me to my face: I will not put my horse back in the herd and I can't change jobs, so I know that was it and I remember I went inside the house and cried my eyes out.

So it's not always fun, because working with feel will also give you intuitive information about your own horse that you don't like to hear at first. Maybe you'll discover that there is something your horse does not like about his life, or wishes you would do things differently, but when you love your horse I think there is always a way to help your him with that.

Working with feel is feeling towards your horse, going into the contact with your horse and like that, seeing, knowing and feeling better what your horse needs, wants and feels. Even if that's not what you'd like to hear.

But maybe you now say: that's easy to say, because I lack feel, and that's why I just don't get these intuitive messages, and that's why the communication with my horse, whether it's energetic, mental or physical isn't that fluent or clear. And that's why my timing also sucks. So I want to know how I can develop that magical feel you're talking about.

Well, I'll give it to you straight... a way to develop feel

Doesn't exist!

You can't develop feel.

I know you've always heard that feel must be developed, that feel is something that comes with experience and after years and years and years of practice or that only the talented horsemen have feel

Well, all that is not true, And you know why?

Do you know WHY you CAN'T develop it?

Because you already HAVE it!

That's right: you already have it!

Then why can't you use it when you need it? Why is it, when you're training your horse, you lack feel? And therefore also timing?

It's simple, because you lost it!

It's hidden deep inside or it's somewhere on the surface but not fully there for a reason. But it is there, the only thing you need to do, is find it again. I mean it, it's really there, you just need to cultivate it again. I've helped a lot of people to find their feel again and they were all able to do it. Because everybody is born with feel.

Just like horses we are social animals and very sensitive animals. Already when we are in our mothers belly we feel the world from this safe place. We are sensitive to her moods and emotions. When we are born all our senses are open, we are fully present in our body. We are born with feel for our environment, with feel for what we need, and when we get older we also get aware of what others need. We feel with our body, our senses and we also feel on an energetic level.

But, the older we get, the more our feel gets overtaken by our mind. This is not something natural, it's something that is the result of the society we live in.

In our western society we get the message that the mind is much more important than our body and our feel. This happens on an unconscious level, by the examples we see around us and by the way our education is organized. A simple example is how most schools put most of the focus on the cognitive development of children. Children are measured by their cognitive abilities already in kindergarten and this only gets worse the older they get. They get

praised for good grades and test results, while the emotional world of the child, body awareness and spiritual and personal development rarely gets attention.

We grow up and live in a society where there's a lot of thinking going on, with a lot of opinions, judgements, and gossip. We think and talk about everything, we form opinions and judgements. We do this about ourselves, about others and about situations. And this is also what we do with our horses: I believe you understand what I mean, you just overthink a lot about your horse, you have opinions about your horse, you often label your horse (you know, my horse is like this and my horse is like that). You also think a lot about how to give aids and how to do this and do that and those are also all actions from your mind. Your body has nothing to do with that.

Don't get me wrong, you need your mind, you need to understand things and you need to plan ahead sometimes, but if your mind is too active, everything gets out of balance. You are too much in your head, and disconnected from your body and therefore your natural feel will get lost.

Because feel is not something of the mind, it is felt with the body, it is generated in the body, it is found in the body, it is something FROM the body. And only from that place, that place of sensitivity and feel, you can make true contact with your horse and you'll receive all the messages you need. All the messages, all the signals that your horse gives you, will be felt by your body in return.

Now, how to do that? How to find the feel, that you once had so naturally as a child, how to find that feel again?

Well, it's all about softness. Softness in your mind, and softness in your body.

Softening your mind, means that your mind and emotions are calm. You are present in the here and now,
And the way to do that is to become more present in your body, bringing your awareness to your body.

One very simply yet effective way to do that is to bring your awareness to your breath. Just observing your breath and all the sensations that come along with that. Notice that I say "sensations", not "thoughts", so no thinking about it, no judging. Only focusing on the sensations of the breath, without wanting to change that breath.

Another simple way is by practicing the bodyscan. This is also one of the exercises I teach in my online “find your feel-course”. The name says it all: you scan your body and by doing that you get more awareness of your body and bodily sensations.

Softening your body is about taking tensions away that you have built up, during the day or even during your life. It’s also about Mindful Moving. Mindful moving, another thing I teach in my find Your Feel course, is being aware of how you move, and in particular being aware of the muscles you use. During mindful moving you try not to use more muscles and muscle strength than you need to do the movements you need to do.

For example: When you stand, you only do what you need to be able to stand. No need to tighten your shoulders for that, you can just let them hang down. However: a lot of people carry tension in their shoulders, and that tension influences the rest of your body and also the way you breathe. This is something your horse notices and your horse will find it more difficult to relax when your breath and shoulders are tensed.

Another example is when you lift your arm, for example to ask you horse to stay at a distance. Then you only need to use the muscles to lift that arm, you don’t need to clench your jaws for that or curl your toes. Because all this results in a less stable posture and in less clear body language.

So softness in your body is key and the way to find your softness is to first become aware of where it is that you have built up tension. That’s the first step. There’s also a second step, because only knowing where the tensions are, is not going to allow you to become softer. To cultivate softness in your body, you have to find a way to take away that tension and you also have to learn how to move without tension again, just like you did when you were a baby and toddler.

Babies and toddlers are the summum of softness! The best example is when they learn how to walk. When they are walking they can take those really bad falls, the kind of fall that makes you stop with whatever you were doing and run up to them, but no: even before you are there the child already forgot about it and is smiling and trying again.

You really wonder how it’s possible, because if you would make a fall like that you would scream your lungs out.

The reason is, that a child, especially a very young child, has no tension in his body. His body still has its natural softness. The baby is also very connected to his body, it's not in his mind. So it's not afraid to fall, even if it has fallen already 10 times in a row. It will keep trying with the same softness in its mind and body.

So, finding that same softness as like when you were a child, softness in mind and body, is what you need to do. I teach my students this with what I call: the softness response.

Most people are really not aware of the tensions in their body, and if you are one of them, which is likely the case, you can learn how to feel the difference between tension and softness by practicing the softness response. This means you will become aware of which body parts carry more or less tension.

By practicing the softness Response you will also feel when tension is building up and where in your body it is building up during the day.

And, most important, you will be able to take tension away without effort, because with the softness response you are actually programming your body to react in a split second with softness.

This will also help you with mental and emotional tension, because body and mind are one, so the body influences the mind and the mind influences the body. So also when you are mentally or emotionally tensed, this will affect your body, resulting in physical tension somewhere in the body. The Softness Response will help you release that tension.

Then, when you are soft in mind and body, in connection with yourself and with your own body, you can connect with your surroundings. And that means also with your horse. You then start feeling towards your horse, this is what I call "going into the contact".

When you are able to truly feel towards your horse in this way, you've found your true feel while working with your horse. And then it is not only you who feels and understands your horse better, but your horse will feel and understand you better too. Because you are soft, the horse can soften too. Because you feel towards the horse, opening up to the horse, the horse can feel towards you too, opening up to you too. And that is true two way communication.

So finding your feel is all about softness and from that softness going into contact with your horse. And of course, what a lot of trainers claim is also true: you need to gain experience in being and working with horses, but experience, for me, is not the most important! I know people with zero experience with horses but who still had their natural feel in life and they have a much better connection with horses than people with tons of experience but who lost their feel. You can see that in those people, you can notice the tension, but you can especially see it in their horses.

Experience is needed, knowledge and skills are needed, but feel is what enables the horse to trust you, to feel good with you, to connect with you on a deeper level.

Ok, we're going to round it up for today. Hopefully this episode was valuable to you and you have a better understanding now about feel and timing. Timing is something that comes automatically when you work with Feel and feel comes automatically when you cultivate softness in your body and your mind.

If you also want to cultivate your softness and feel, and learn about the exercises that I talked about, then I have good news for you, because at the moment I am updating my online course, which is called "Find Your feel".

Currently this is a bonus course of the Horsefulness groundwork program, so you can only follow it when you are a student of my online groundwork course, but at the moment I'm updating and improving this find your feel course with new content. It will be ready very soon and be available as a separate course!

So if you want to improve your feel when working with horses or in general, this is the course you need!

For now, if you have questions about feel, then don't hesitate to ask them, you can do that in the horsefulness training fan club on Facebook. If you're not a member yet, just do a request and I'll let you in!

now it's time to reveal the person who won a free membership to the online horsefulness liberty training program! It's a winning picture this time. And the winner is: Eliška Staňková, with her beautiful picture of her and her horse enjoying an evening walk in liberty. Thank you Eliska for your picture and

please send a mail to info@horsefulnesstraining.com so I can give you entrance to the program!

Ok everybody, Thank you for listening to this episode about Feel and I encourage you to subscribe on i-tunes or your favorite service and please leave your comments and reviews. That way you too can help spreading the Horsefulness Training philosophy!

Thank you for listening, and as always keep the following important message in mind:

Care for you horse, connect with your horse, And make a difference in your horse's life.

Because your horse only lives once, and you are the one who can make sure it's is worth it!