

Hello and welcome to the Horsefulness Training Podcast.

My name is Karine Vandendorre, I'm a professional horse trainer and instructor, founder of Horsefulness Training and creator of the online Horsefulness Training Programs.

In this fourth episode of the Horsefulness Training Podcast, I'm going to talk about 5 main causes why horses lose their joy and become fearful, stressed or resistant during their training. So if you are experiencing problems with your horse at the moment, or you want to prevent having problems, I'm sure this episode will be valuable to you!

Are you ready?

(music)

Now, before we start to investigate the 5 main causes why horses lose their joy and become fearful, stressed or resistant during their training, we have to briefly pause at the fact, which is commonly overlooked because of our own goals. This fact is that horses are such sensitive animals, and all they really want as a social and emotional being is to preserve harmony in their herd but also in the interaction with their human.

They want to feel at home and safe, also in the human world.

That's why they will always try their best to understand, to cooperate and to communicate what they need to feel calm, connected and happy.

Unfortunately,

I see a lot of horses who have lost their joy, who became fearful, unconfident, unmotivated or resistant during training.

In this podcast, I want to give you 5 main causes for that.

The first is without any doubt: not having a good connection with your horse!

Don't you think that's normal? If your horse doesn't like you, doesn't trust you, doesn't feel a strong bond with you, do you think it will be happy to be trained by you? To work together with you? Of course not, that's logical!

So the relationship with your horse is really the foundation on which the rest is built.

A deep connection can grow by developing a clear communication in liberty, by bonding naturally in the way horses also bond with each other, by learning how to interact with your horse in the way horses interact in the herd. In liberty, you not only develop a true connection

but you also learn so many valuable skills that you can take with you from the moment you start other training, that in my opinion, everybody should do liberty before doing something else.

Another reason that causes so-called “difficult” or “problematic” horses is not enough training skills and knowledge about horse training in general, so not knowing what, why, when and how to teach a horse new skills or exercises.

How do you use your body? What are the correct aids to give? When and how should you reward or praise your horse? How long do you continue? How do you see that the horse needs a break? etc

A few years ago I was teaching a young woman, let's call her Jane, and her Arabian mare. This mare had an abusive past. When Jane worked with her In liberty all went fine, but the problem started from the moment she was put a halter on.

By the time Jane came to me for lessons, the mare strongly pulled back or started running in circles when Jane tried to lead her with a halter and a lead rope.

The reaction of Jane was pulling on the head of the mare in an attempt to calm her down and stop her from pulling and running around.

So I explained to Jane that pulling her mares head would only make it worse because it frightened her and made her pull back even more, because she would fight the pressure.

I also explained why horses do that and how horses calm down by using calming body movements and body posture, just like she did when she worked with her at liberty. She tried what I showed her and at the end of the lesson her mare calmly followed her through the arena.

What a difference that was!

Jane cried out of relief while her horse stood quietly beside her, putting her nose on Jane's shoulder.

It was a moment of true connection. And that because Jane finally understood the reason behind the pulling and running of her mare and she also understood that it got worse and worse because of her own reaction to this.

It was her lack of training skills that caused all these problems. She just didn't know that pulling on a horse is not good and that she was teaching her horse to pull harder and harder

So knowing this, changing her body language, and learning how to give correct aids, finally, her horse calmed down and started trusting her human during groundwork.

Now luckily Jane asked for advice, not everybody does this.

Lot's of people don't do that, they keep trying on their own and of course that is ok, but that can only work if they have enough skills and knowledge already, so if they know what to do, why to do it, when to do it and how to do it.

If someone does not have enough experience with that or the horse is very challenging, this can create problems in the relationship and training of their horse.

Their horse can start to become distrustful or dangerous and all sorts of behavioral problems can start to occur.

Once such a problem is there, it takes knowledge and excellent training skills to solve it.

So my advise is always: don't let it come that far! Set yourself and your horse up for success from the moment you meet each other and start your life together! And if nevertheless, you end up in a stressful situation with your horse, you have to know that you can always do something about it! Ask a professional to help you, It's never too late!

A third cause for problems during training is assuming because a horse is born in the human world, it automatically understands human wishes.

In every domesticated horse, there still lives a wild horse, that doesn't automatically understand what the human world is about. Let's take the example of the fact that they are prey animals.

Yes, they are born in the human world, in a safe box or field, where there will never be predators who will chase and eat them.

Still, in some situations, they can still react to danger as a prey animal does, and that is fleeing when they sense danger. Also, think about trailer loading: because they are a prey animal they are afraid of being locked up in a small space like a trailer, because they can't run if they want to.

They really need to learn, step by step, that it is ok to be in a trailer, that it is nothing to be afraid of.

However, there are so many horses who are being labeled as unwilling or stubborn because they refuse to be trailer loaded. In reality, their humans didn't take the time to practice this, they just assumed that the horse would go in only because it physically can and it's being asked to do so. And it's the same with other human wishes too, think about

haltering the horse, leading the horse, lunging the horse, treatments by the vet, the dentist, the hoof trimmer, saddling a horse, riding a horse, ...

Luckily we can help and prepare the horse for all that by working in liberty and doing correct groundwork!

There is also a fourth cause that horses become unhappy and that is underestimating the role of mindset and self-awareness

I once had a client, let's call him Joe, who said his horse was never playful during training. Joe said he didn't like training his mare anymore, because she didn't enjoy it and didn't show any interest.

I noticed that Joe never laughed or smiled, he was always very very serious.

So when Joe said he was thinking about selling her, I asked him how he felt in life, what made him joyful in his life.

He couldn't answer the question...

I explained to him that horses are very sensitive to energy and emotions. That when one horse starts to play, other horses often start playing as well, I'm sure you have also seen this before.

Playful energy is catching, it's contagious. And more important to know :

playing is the brain's favorite way of learning.

So if a horse is not motivated to learn, then it's possible that this is because things are too serious, there is no playful energy

Joe looked at me, very very serious.

So I showed him what I meant and the horse, little by little, started to become more alive, more playful and more interested.

Then Joe tried the same, but in no time his mare was looking uninterested and unmotivated again.

I said to Joe: "to get the best out of your horse, you should first get the best out of yourself"

Not everybody would take this kind of advice and do something with it, so when the weeks and the months passed I was sure I wouldn't hear anything from Joe again. I was sure he already sold his mare.

How big was my surprise when more than one year later I received an email from him telling me that everything went well with his horse and himself.

He took my advice, worked on his own mindset and his own happiness and was now ready to start taking lessons again. When I saw Joe and his mare again, he looked much happier and his mare as well!

I'm telling you this story to make clear that self-awareness and mindfulness are very important.

Are you aware of how you are feeling? What and how you are thinking? Can you be present in the moment? Are you connected to yourself? How are you breathing? Are your muscles and movements soft or tensed? And can you generate the energy inside yourself that you would like to see in your horse?

All this has a major influence on your horse!

When you are together with your horse, you are a herd of two and you influence each other, you are always exchanging energy and emotions.

So when you become more mindful and when you develop more self-awareness and body awareness, you start to see how you are influencing your horse.

Because of that, you will be able to transform the things inside of you that need transformation. So mindfulness and self-awareness will always have a positive influence on how you train your horse and how your horse feels.

And finally what I see as the 5th cause for problems during training is

Working from the head, and not enough from the heart.

When someone trains from the head, he is training too technical. The trainer follows a certain training method, in most cases a very strict and non-dynamic training method, and knows exactly what to do, how to do it and when to do it, within this referral framework.

Because the trainer is too much into the technical aspect of the training, he is only focussing on the correct movements, correct responses, and correct results. For a horse, this feels very cold and very unpleasant. The trainer doesn't feel towards the inner being of the horse anymore, so

there can't be a real connection. This kind of trainers often don't take the time to develop a true connection before they train their horse, because they want results immediately.

But a true connection is needed if you want the training to be successful.

Trainers who work from the head only, often use coercive techniques. This is because they are insensitive to what their heart is telling, they don't see or feel the pain that the horse goes through when it is forced.

But because horses always try their best to keep the harmony, most of them will eventually do everything their human ask, but they are not truly connected because they don't feel a true and warm interaction with their human. Slowly but surely the light in their eyes fades away.

After a while, these horses do everything that is asked, without ever saying no. They don't initiate things anymore, they don't give their opinion, they only do what they are told and that's it. They look calm, but in reality that is not calmness, it's a shut-down horse

Ok, so these were 5 main causes, I've seen throughout my career, that make horses start to feel unhappy, lose their joy, become tensed and stressed or become unmotivated and resistant in their interaction with their human. Some horses even become dangerous. That's when people decide to retire their horse or they keep trying year after year after year, without finding a true solution, feeling sad because their dream horse didn't turn out to be their dream horse after all.

it's very sad that a lot of horses are being sold multiple times in their lives or even worse: brought to the slaughterhouse, while all they were doing was trying hard to communicate with their human, telling them they didn't understand, felt unhappy, angry, frustrated or anxious...

Now, those were the dark clouds, but fortunately there's also a happy part

The happy part is you have the ability to give your horse what it needs to feel happy in our human world, to understand our human world.

you are capable of overcoming your own fears and insecurities, that hold you back from being the best possible trainer you can be for your horse.

You too can train your horse successfully.

You too can really make a difference in your horse's life,

And I know, maybe you're thinking, "yeah that's great for you or others who are gifted, but I don't believe I'll ever be able to train my horse myself."

Or some might say," uhuh, but my horse is different, liberty or groundwork isn't going to help on my horse and I don't think anything will."

My answer to that is that every problem can be solved and everyone can be a good trainer for his horse.

Maybe you think you can't, because you're not a professional, but hey, you don't have to be the world's greatest! As long as you get the right guidance and can follow a logical step by step and respectful system, many great things are possible!

I'm going to leave you here, but before I go, I want to invite you to leave your comments or post your questions.

Did you recognize yourself in 1 or more of the 5 causes we discussed in this podcast?

Let me know and post your comments and questions on my blog, I'll be reading and answer each one of them personally!

I want to thank you for listening and I encourage you to subscribe on i-tunes or your favorite service and please leave your comments and reviews.

I'm going to leave you here and don't forget:

Care for your horse,
connect with your horse,
and make a difference in your horse's life.
'cause your horse only lives once,
and you're the one who can make sure it's worth it!