Horse Handling Essentials For Groundwork and Coaching

Compiled for the Dutch Eponaquest Apprenticeship by

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Horse Handling Essentials For Groundwork and Coaching

- **The natural priorities of the horse**
- **The natural priorities of humans**
- **“Horse Language” to safely move horses around**

The Natural Priorities of the Horse

1) Peace Of Mind (= **Safety**)
2) Water & Food
3) Social Interaction
4) Reproduction

And at all times…

5) Save energy for emergencies

Characteristic	Horse	Human
Mammal	✓	✓
Herd Animal	✓	✓
Prey Animal	✓	✓
Hunts other species for sustenance	✗	✓
Fleeing = **first reflex** when in danger	✓	✗
Fighting = **first reflex** when in danger	✗	✓
Capacity for **incongruence**	10%	90%

The Natural Priorities of Humans:

- ARE EXACTLY THE SAME IN THE SAME ORDER ☺
- But: we are not herbivores. Nature has designed us to hunt (even if we stick to a vegan diet).
- So we AUTOMATICALLY react like predators in our subconscious reflexes.
- This complicates “Speaking Horse”

Speaking Horse Language

1 – Who are you to the horse?

2 – How does a horse decide who is the leader?

3 – Communication: saying “I’m the Leader” in Horse Language

Speaking Horse Language

1 - Who Are You To The Horse?

*A horse doesn't care who **you** think you are. It sees you as either 1 of only 3 options, depending on YOUR (conscious or subconscious) behaviour.*

1) My Herd Leader
2) Lower in Herd Hierarchy Than Me
3) A (Potential) Danger

Speaking Horse Language

How does a horse decide who is the leader?

Through asking 2 questions.

Question 1: Are YOU the leader?

If you answer this with "NO" in horse language, whether you intend to or not, the horse will take the lead for its own safety. Remember Horse Priority 1!

Question 2: Are you SURE?

See above.

Speaking Horse Language

All other questions **you may think** a horse asks, are:

1) Humanification
2) Projection or transference
3) An invitation for engaging in deep animal communication (but only if 1 and 2 are ruled out first!)

Therefore you don't have time to focus on them while moving a horse safely from A to B. (But you may wish to reflect on them afterwards)

Speaking Horse Language

Answering "Yes I'm the leader"!

1. Prioritise being **congruent** at any given time. (This will allow for coherence.)
2. Press the Right "Buttons"
3. Clear Intent, Clear Boundaries, Clear Actions
4. Make It As Easy As Possible

Speaking Horse Language

1) Prioritise being congruent at any given time

Congruence is a “MUST HAVE”
(tool: Body Scan)
Coherence is a “NICE TO HAVE”
(tool: Coherent Breathing)

A horse doesn’t care WHAT you feel (for example fear, anger or frustration) – it wants to know if you are CONGRUENT. If you are incongruent, you behave like a potential threat or even predator: then you are not able to project clarity and inner peace, so the horse reacts instantly by taking the lead.

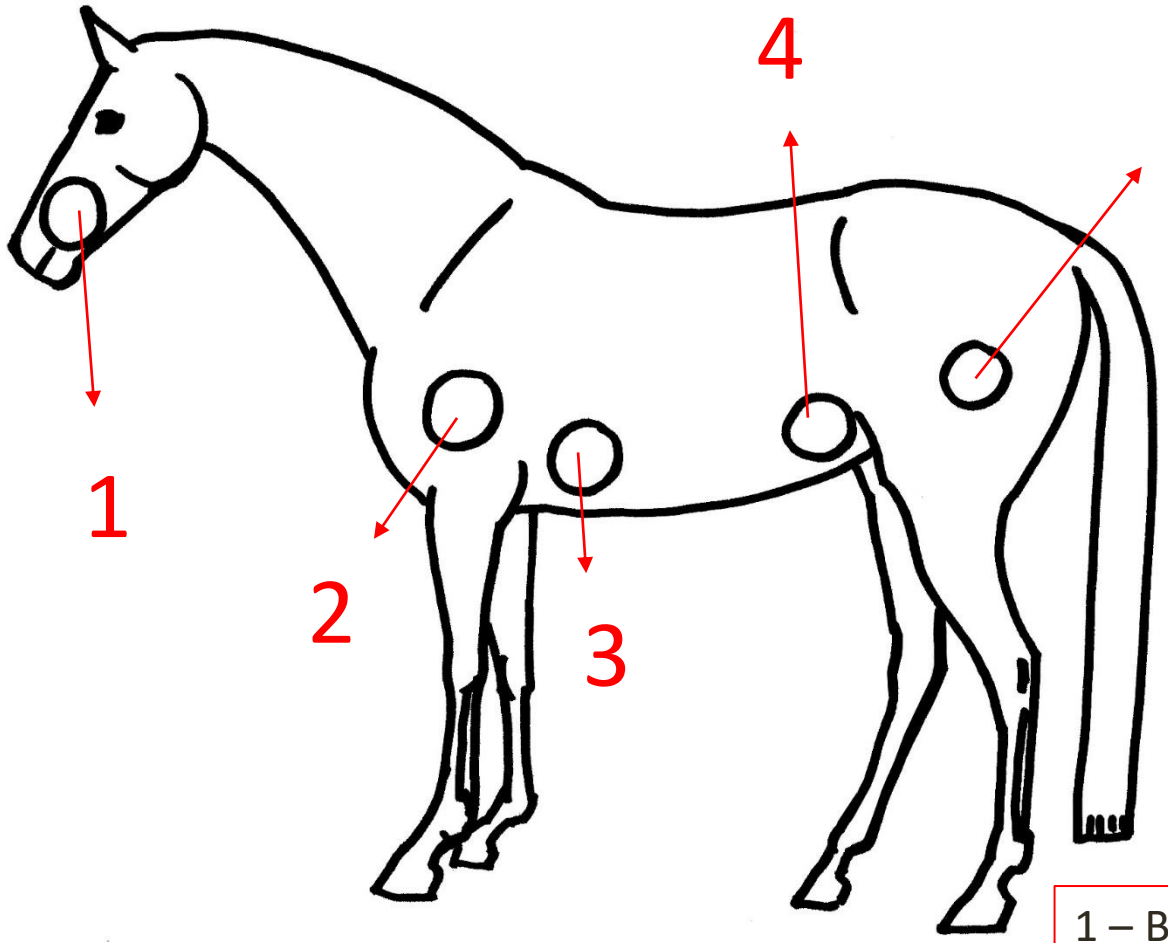
Congruence is the first step to achieving coherence: the state we all like the most, horses and humans alike! It is not possible to achieve Coherence without becoming Congruent first.

Speaking Horse Language

2) Press the right “buttons”

Horse herd body language:

Horses move and stop each other by pointing at 5 pressure points on the body.



1 – Block head/mouth
2 – Turn front
3 – “Relax Button”
4 – “Speed Button”
5 – Turn hind

Speaking Horse Language

3) Clear Intent, Clear Boundaries, Clear Actions

Being clear to a horse, requires us humans to be counter-intuitive! Practice counter-intuitive reactions with help of the Master Herder Roles.

- Human survival reflex when tension builds, is to GRASP and PULL (Predator). This causes fight and flight response in a horse.
- But even a Shettie is stronger than a human! So combine DRAW & CONNECT (Leader & Nurturer) with BLOCK and DRIVE (Dominant) instead.
- First comes Speed, then Direction. Instead of trying to stop the speed, use the movement to determine the horse's direction and keep yourself safe.

Speaking Horse Language

4) Make It As Easy As Possible

- **Prepare/think ahead.** Check the route/terrain. Inventorise any obstacles make a plan for getting past them.
- **Work one step at a time**. Always focus on the next step ahead. Not on the end goal.
- **Use good gear**. Use gear that you are comfortable with and that supports you in the Inner Judo game with your reflexes.
- **Invest in Getting "Handy"!** KEEP TAKING LESSONS AND PRACTICE. Not just with horse handling, groundwork, body scan, breathing and Master Herder Roles, but also with gear such as leadrope and boundary device.