

## SCHOOLING HORSES

In Straightness Training we want to teach the horse all kinds of Straightness Training (ST) elements, such as:

- Seat, leg, rein aids
- Voice, whip and body cues
- Exercises, such as the haunches-in
- Artificial movements, such as piaffe

In ST we will talk about schooling horses. But we could also add the following synonyms to this list:

- Horse whispering
- Horse taming
- Breaking horses
- Conditioning
- Behavior modification
- Training
- Teaching
- Communication
- Connection
- Education
- Mastery



In ST we embrace all kinds of synonyms, so just choose the word you are most comfortable with. It depends on your own values, beliefs, and references what you prefer (and we'll come back to that later in Episode #3 of the ST Mini Mastery Course).

For this manual let's stick to the word that the old grandmasters used: the schooling of a horse, based on how the Greeks schooled their body, mind, and soul in an integrated way in the 'Gymnasia' and how kings and knights were schooled in an integrated way at the Renaissance Riding Academies (and we'll come back to that later in Episode #4 of the ST Mini Mastery Course).

## SCHOOLING ZONES

During training there are three zones you need to be aware of:

1. The comfort zone
2. The stretch zone
3. The stress zone

In general, the comfort zone is the place where the horse feels comfortable.

The stretch zone is where the learning takes place.

The stress zone is the zone to avoid; this zone is also called the 'panic' zone or 'danger' zone, and that's where 'fight', 'flight' and 'freeze' live.



## 1. COMFORT ZONE

The comfort zone is a psychological state in which a horse feels familiar, at ease, in control and experiences hardly any levels of fear and stress.

It's the zone where the horse will eat, sleep, rest and digest.

In ST this 'comfort' zone is also the location of the skills and abilities the horse has acquired, and in this zone a steady level of performance is possible.

It's a safe and easy place, but it's also unchallenged and it might get boring for both rider and horse if they only stay in the comfort zone all the time.

However, the comfort zone is very important to enter when you want to give a horse a break between two sets of exercises, because a horse will learn faster when he can return to a relaxed state after the learning experience.

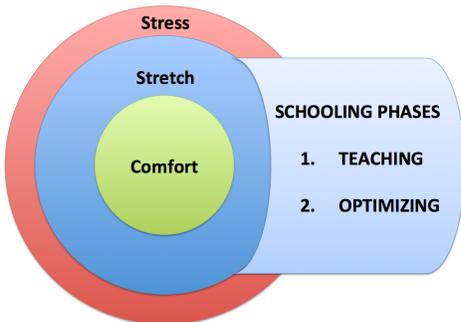
So the comfort zone is an important area for the horse to relax and to digest what he just learned.



## 2. STRETCH ZONE

Teaching new exercises and practicing and optimizing difficult exercises take place in the 'stretch' zone.

In ST we talk about two schooling phases, the 'Teaching' and 'Optimizing' phase and the stretch zone is the zone to be for these phases:



- In the Teaching phase, the stretch zone is the zone where learning, growth, and development take place.

The skills and abilities that are just out of reach are in the 'stretch' zone, in the learning zone; they're neither so far away that the horse is too 'stressed' about it, nor close enough where they're too easy.

- In the Optimizing phase, the stretch zone is the 'optimal performance zone' in which the horse's balance, suppleness, shape, tempo, and rhythm in the exercises can be 'stretched' by some amount of healthy challenge.

In the Teaching phase, you give the horse a Release, Reward and a moment of Relaxation (RRR) after every single step in the right direction. So once your horse has given you the slightest 'try', you give RRR and return to the comfort zone.

In the Optimizing phase, you give the horse a Release, Reward and a moment of Relaxation (RRR) after every step the horse gives more quality. So once your horse has given you the slightest 'better' you give RRR and return to the comfort zone.



Picture: Optimizing haunches-in on the diagonal (half pass) in work in hand, riding, groundwork and at liberty.

### 3. STRESS ZONE

In the stress zone, the horse will be in a state of fight, flight or freeze (FFF), where adrenaline starts to flow, making the horse more reactive and alert for at least 20 minutes.

In a state of FFF, your horse might fail to cooperate with you in doing ST.

Now environmental circumstances might be the cause of stress, but also the use of too much, too long, sudden or steady pressure might be the cause.

Now in ST we don't want to get our horse into stress, panic and danger, because when a horse is feeling very much uncomfortable and is getting tensed, frustrated, tired and anxious, he can no longer think and he won't learn anything.

So it's important to monitor the body, mind, emotions, and spirit of the horse during training so we can change our approach if needed and redirect the horse back towards the comfort zone.

### SCHOOLING FUNDAMENTALS

When the horse is not in a state of FFF, there are three other major schooling fundamentals that make a difference in your outcome in all schooling phases;

1. Relationship
2. Communication
3. Motivation

#### 1. RELATIONSHIP

A good relationship between you and your horse can make a huge difference when training your horse. It will lead to the famous '2 mm' extra amount of motivation that is needed to accomplish a difficult or challenging exercise. A strong bond can make the difference between a 'good' cooperation or an 'excellent' cooperation.

When you have a good relationship, your horse will make up for possible shortcomings on your part. And when you are running out of treats, or your horse is getting tired, he'll do it anyway. When you have a good relationship, he will give his *Best Aikido* no matter what. So make sure to always put the relationship between you and your horse first!

Now a simple strategy to improve the relationship is to 'hang out' together; be not only a human 'doing', but also a human 'being', by just being together. Don't ask things from this horse, don't want to DO something with your horse.

Your horse will appreciate it, and it will strengthen the bond.



## 2. COMMUNICATION

It is important to communicate in a way that it is easy for your horse to understand. Therefore, you need to give clear, consistent, and congruent (CCC) signals to your horse.

### Clarity is key

It's important that you can explain to your horse what you mean, that you can make yourself clear, so that your horse can meet your request. Now to make yourself clear, you need to understand 'the horse' in general (his characteristics, needs, use of senses, the way horses learn) and 'your horse' in specific (his personality, his desires, what triggers his fight/flight modus, his history, his past experiences) so you can create a tailor-made plan for 'your horse' to set the teaching up for success.

### Consistency is key

When communicating with your horse, make sure 'black' is always 'black' and 'white' is always 'white'. We, humans, are often very inconsistent, where today black is black, but tomorrow grey is the new black. So with horses, make sure A is always A and not B in certain occasions. So don't ask him to canter for the inside leg today and tomorrow your main aid is the outside leg. Both ways are okay, but make a choice, don't mix it. Also with behavior, be very consistent. For example one day we demand that the horse patiently waits for his carrot, the next day we allow him to rummage in our pockets, because we are too tired to do anything about it. The day after we reprimand him for rummaging, because we had a good night's sleep and are on top form again. That will confuse your horse, so be consistent in your behavior.

### Congruency is key

With our body language (position, movement, posture) we can influence our horse, for example;

- With your position in front, next or behind the horse you can drive him forward or slow him down.
- If you move more or less, your horse will move more or less as well.
- If you move towards the horse, you will take space, if you move away, you give your horse space.
- With our posture, 'airbag' or 'soap bubble' you can express more powerful or mild energy and you can customize it to the situation.

When you use contradictory positions, movements, and postures, your horse might disconnect, because it might lead to confusion or the horse might start to feel unsure. For example, if you want to catch your horse or you want your horse to come to you, but you pull your 'airbag' out and move in a straight line towards him, it might be that your horse will leave and is hard to catch.

So if you want your horse to follow you in haunches-in on the diagonal, make sure to move backward, give the horse space by having your 'airbag' in, avoid being too upright in your posture and avoid too strongly focused eyes.



It's important that you communicate with CCC, that you project clear energy and that you are consistent and congruent, because this increases the chances that your horse will stay connected to you, like two connected soap bubbles.

### 3. MOTIVATION

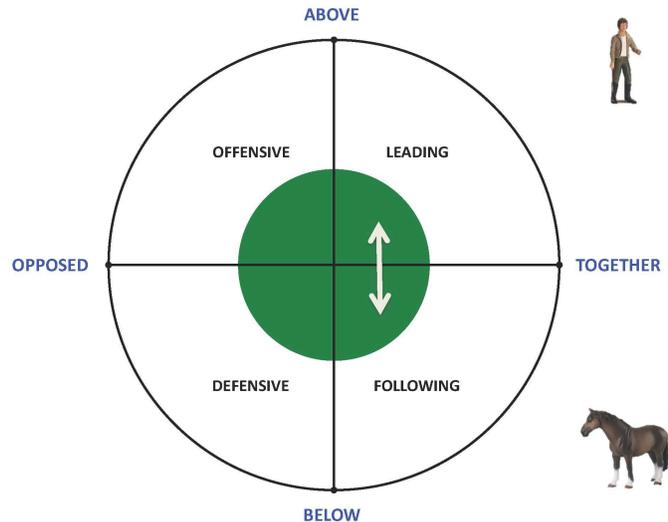
It's one thing that your horse understands your request, but what's more important:

- Does your horse want to meet your request?
- Is he motivated to do what you want him to do?
- Are you able to convince him to do what you want?

Because you have a problem if your horse understands what you want, but is not motivated to perform.

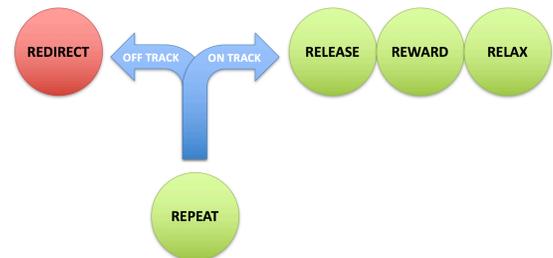
Therefore, it's important to keep your horse on the *together* side of the interaction quadrant. Because when you want to teach your horse an exercise in ST or if you want to optimize his performance in a certain exercise, he needs to be in a learning frame of mind and follow your suggestions.

So in the Teaching and Optimizing phase, it's not useful and fruitful when your horse is on the *opposed* side, in an *offensive* or *defensive* state, because in these states the horse is not motivated to work with you and he won't think about what you ask him to do. He's not in a 'thinking' frame of mind, because his 'reptilian' brain - the brain for survival - takes over.



Now of course you need to be sure your horse is healthy and not in pain, so that it's a true motivational issue. Then if it's a true motivational issue, you need to find ways to convince your horse to do what you want done. And the 5R Motivation Concept might help you with that:

In this concept, you use a combination of *Release-Reward-Repeat* when your horse is 'on track' and shows desired behavior, and you *Redirect* when your horse is 'off track' and shows undesired behavior:



- Especially the Release is very important, because your horse will quickly decide the exercise is too hard if you use too much, too long, sudden or steady pressure and don't release often/ soon/ quickly/ long. So the Release is more motivating than the aids and cues (pressure) you use.
- Then the addition of a Reward to your Release will give your horse's drive to meet your request a huge boost. So make sure to not only release, but also to reward.
- Relax to give your horse a moment of time to return to the comfort zone and to digest what he just learned. RRR on the little steps in the Teaching phase and encourage every better with RRR in the Optimizing phase.
- When your horse goes off track, do some self-reflection first and change your pressure/release technique if needed, then Redirect him with a "No, try again" or "Wait, think about it" and let him know that if he changes his behavior, that the RRR is available for him.
- Then after the RRR, Repeat, because repetition is the mother of all skill. Of course, don't overdo things and make sure to end on the peak performance of the day.

Enjoy the process and good luck!

## ST ACADEMY

**We imagine a world** in which the vast majority of riders wake up every single morning inspired to do great things with their horse and feel fulfilled at the end of the day!

Where riders have an **amazing relationship** and **magnificent life** with their horse!

A world **without unnecessary suffering** for horses and their riders, because life's too short to suffer!

We, as an organization, see ourselves as leading a movement to build this world.

We want as many riders as possible to **make a positive difference** for their horse, where they put the body, mind, heart, and soul of the horse first, and can be the change they want to see!

To build this world, we know that we can't do it alone:

We know that **together is better!**

Therefore, by using the internet, we can join forces in the **Straightness Training Academy**.



It's the place where:

- ancient wisdom
- modern science
- common sense
- practical experience
- fun
- and mastery

... come together, to help you on your personal path to mastery, so you can be the best you can be for your horse!

By inviting people to join the online Straightness Training Academy, we hope to create an inspiring group of loyal horse trainers and instructors dedicated to the cause of improving health, joy, and beauty in working with horses - based on the **principles of Straightness Training**.

The Straightness Training Academy consists of the ST Mastery Program, the ST Evaluation Program, and the ST Instructor Program:

- The comprehensive, well-structured, simple to use and user-friendly **ST Mastery Program** integrates all aspects on working on you and your horse. It has all the 'why, what, how and when' for training horses. And it works brilliantly on all types of horses, regardless of age and breed. And anyone with any horse can join this program - no matter what age or breed or level of competence - there are no admission requirements to join. The program includes step-by-step coaching and 24/7 support to get to the next levels of you and your horse's abilities.
- Also, you will have access to the **ST Evaluation Program**, whereby you can submit videos of your training to be evaluated to help guide you further on your journey. This approach enables you to progress at your own pace and to stay on track, and it's an invaluable support in your horsemanship journey! It helps you take your level of horsemanship and relationship with your horse to a completely different level - one you never believed would be possible before!
- When students have passed a certain set of evaluations in the Training Pillars groundwork, longeing, work in hand, riding, and liberty, they can enroll in the international **ST Instructor Program**. Marijke de Jong's Straightness Training Academy aims to form a worldwide professional group of loyal and dedicated horse trainers and instructors to the cause of improving health, joy and beauty in working with horses based on the principles of Straightness Training.

The educational programs of the ST Academy help students to optimize their training skills by applying the academical concepts and exercises in their own training sessions with their own horses. This way they can actualize their horse's potential and reach harmony and unity with their horse.

All concepts and exercises are shared with the students in fun, inspiring, super-practical online Mastery modules, on topics like:

- Horsemanship
- Training skills
- Groundwork
- Longeing
- Work in hand
- Riding
- Training at liberty

Mastery students have Marijke de Jong as their personal coach on their personal path to mastery. And the wonderful thing about the ST Academy is, that you'll reach like-minded Mastery students all across the world, but **never have to leave home**.

We'd love to have you join us!

For more information:

[www.StraightnessTraining.com/Academy](http://www.StraightnessTraining.com/Academy)

[www.StraightnessTraining.com/Mastery](http://www.StraightnessTraining.com/Mastery)

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