

Rider Confidence

...when talking to yourself and taking a deep breath are not enough



W O R K B O O K

with Anna Bergenstrahle

Rider Confidence

...when talking to yourself and taking a deep breath are not enough

A woman wearing a black riding helmet and a black t-shirt is riding a brown horse with a white blaze on its face. The horse is standing in a field of tall, golden grass. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a bright sky. A dark brown banner is overlaid on the image, containing white text.

December 5th 6pm EST

with Anna Bergenstrahle

Welcome

Anna Bergenstrahle

MSc Exercise Science

MSc Equine Science

Introduction

Let's face it: riding with nervous butterflies in your stomach, your heart beating out of your chest and your brain barely able to form a thought...stinks!

How can you be fully present in the moment, focused on your horse and performing at your best...when your body is in 'anxiety' mode?

Most riders have become used to believing that fear, or a loss of confidence in riding, is all in our head - which is why mindset work, positive affirmations, visualization and even hypnosis are the most common ways riders are advised to try out in order to get their lack of confidence under control.

***Please note: a positive attitude is important, all athletes benefit greatly from mindset work and visualization is an essential part of any athletic performance - that goes without saying...

...BUT: there is a MISSING KEY in the discussion around RIDER CONFIDENCE that is largely overlooked and not talked about.

In fact, for most riders, it is THE missing key to feeling totally confident in the saddle!

And this is the MISSING KEY we are going to talk about in this workshop!

Pre-Workshop Introduction

In short: THE MISSING KEY to RIDER CONFIDENCE is
physiology!

Every bodily function is controlled by our Central Nervous System (CNS). While we live in 'modern times' we still have a "primitive" CNS that wants to make sure we stay alive: via fight or flight.

Optimal movement and functioning of the body allows the CNS to think we are safe - that we are ready and physically capable of fight or flight, or in other words: that we can get out of danger if we need (very simplistic explanation of course).

When certain body parts don't move well, such as not being able to freely turn ones head...or being stiff and protective of ones back, the CNS sends out a warning signal and the body 'get's 'prepared for fight or flight' - increased heart rate, sweaty palms, dry mouth etc. (in other words: anxiety, nerves, a lack of confidence)!

This is a physiological reaction - one that we cannot control with our mind, our thoughts.

"Trying to control your mind with your mind is like trying to catch fog." Dr. Huberman

That is why positive affirmations, mindset work and visualization sometimes don't do the trick!

Pre-Workshop Introduction

Riders tend to be tough and used to pushing through stiffness and pain - in fact: statistics show that 80% of riders have some type of musculoskeletal pain.

And while it might seem like a reasonable option to ignore stiffness and pain - our brain cannot ignore pain.

"...many of the areas that fire in chronic pain ... also process thoughts, sensations, images, memories, movements, emotions, and beliefs ... when they are not processing pain."

When we have acute pain about 5% of those centers get busy with the pain...when we have chronic pain up to 25% of those centers are busy processing pain...and can thus not function at full capacity!

*This explains **why**, **when** we are in pain:*

*"we can't concentrate or **think** well;*

***why** we **have** sensory problems
can't tolerate sounds or **light***

***why** we can't move more gracefully*

*and **why** we can't control our emotions very well*

*and become irritable and **have** emotional outbursts.*

The areas that regulate these activities have been hijacked to process the pain signal."

Norman Doidge, M.D.

So...is your 'lack of confidence' all in your head...or is there a REAL and VALID reason why your brain is giving you a warning signal that then is translated into that feeling of nervousness in the saddle???

LET'S FIND OUT!

Pre-Workshop Prep

Let's get prepared for our time together

What to expect:

A lack of confidence in the saddle often feels like fog!
It is hard to define - often we can't explain it even to ourselves -
and it most certainly feels hard to control!

I am going to share with you **CLARITY**
on the **PHYSIOLOGY OF RIDER CONFIDENCE**

... so you can step out of the fog and know with certainty how to become the confident rider
you need to be to have fun in the saddle and make your horse feel safe with you!

And: Prepare to have the best time you've ever had
talking about **RIDER CONFIDENCE!** 😊

How to get ready:

On the first couple of pages of this book I have prepared a few questions for you.
Please take the time to think them over and answer them.

If you have any questions please reach out: anna@riderfitness.com

Confidence

Here are a few definitions of **CONFIDENCE**

Def.:

- a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities
- a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or of reliance on one's circumstances
- faith or belief that one will act in a right, proper, or effective way

Confidence



**What is my personal definition of confidence
in regards to riding?**

**On a scale from 0 to 10 how confident do I feel in the saddle on average?
(0 being not confident at all and 10 being super confident)**

How bad does it get? Please the 'worst' case scenario

Confidence

When I don't feel confident in the saddle it feels like ...

When I don't feel confident in the saddle I

When I don't feel confident in the saddle my horse

Confidence

What 'stinks' the most about feeling this way in the saddle?

How would I like to feel in the saddle instead?

If I felt that way in the saddle - what would change about my riding - my interaction with my horse(s) - what I plan to do with my horse(s) this summer?

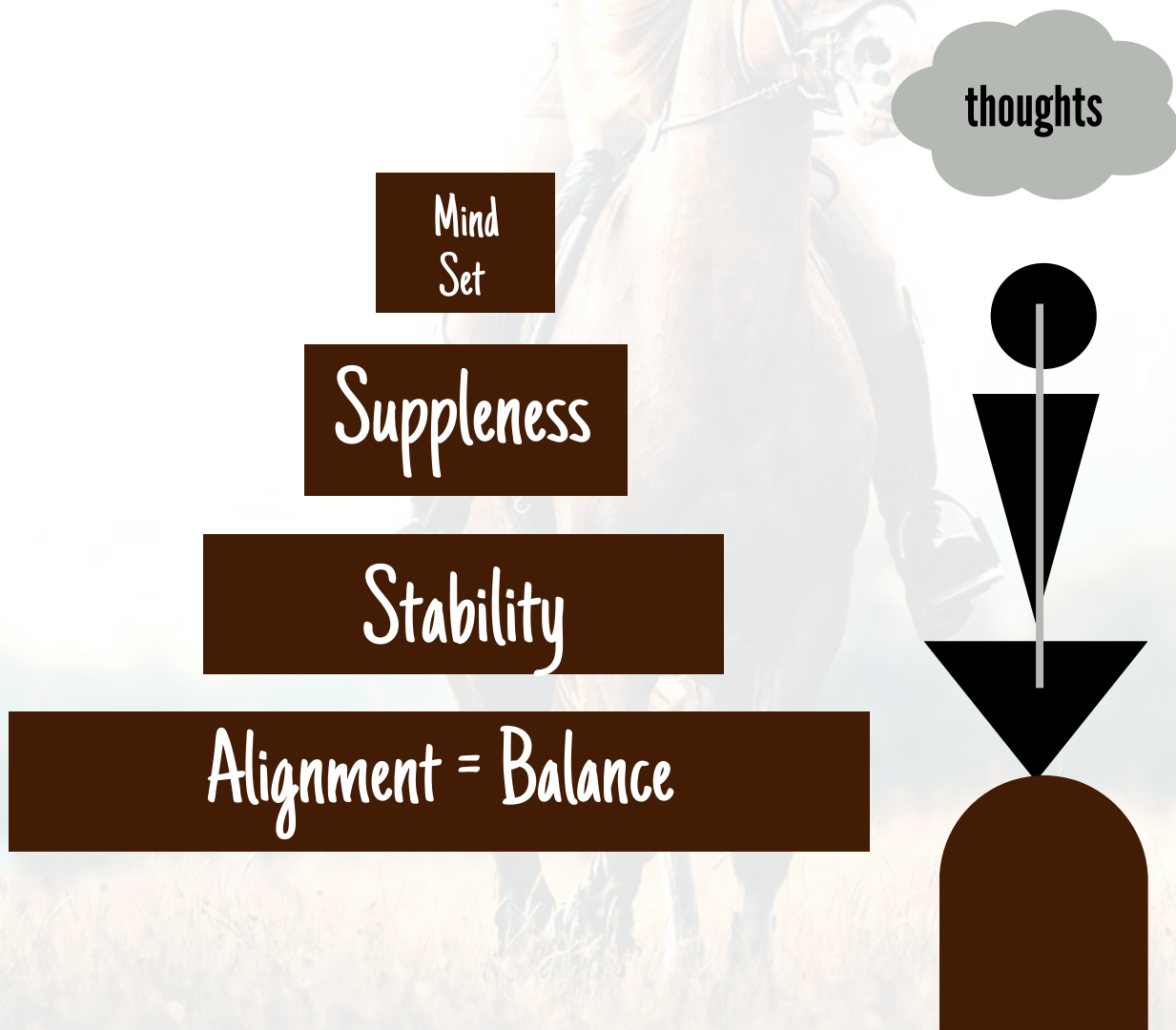
Confidence ... is built on physical preparation

Trevor Moawad, mental conditioning coach to elite athletes and performers, says in his book ***It Takes What It Takes***:

Confidence is the belief that you can do what is demanded.

This is why I've never bought into the idea that the mind is anything more than 5 to 10 percent of the equation.

...it is clear to me that if you don't have the physiology and skill set to achieve something, no amount of will can overcome that.



Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

Here is the tricky part:

We tend to think of how we feel (anxious, nervous) as
an emotion

...but often how we feel is a
a sensation

It's based on PHYSIOLOGY!

Fear is a physiological sympathetic nervous system response!

Your sympathetic nervous system is best known for its role in responding to dangerous or stressful situations.

In these situations, your sympathetic nervous system activates to speed up your heart rate, deliver more blood to areas of your body that need more oxygen or other responses to help you get out of danger.

The mind-body connection says we can feel fear in response to thoughts

...but the MIND-BODY connection is equally powerful!

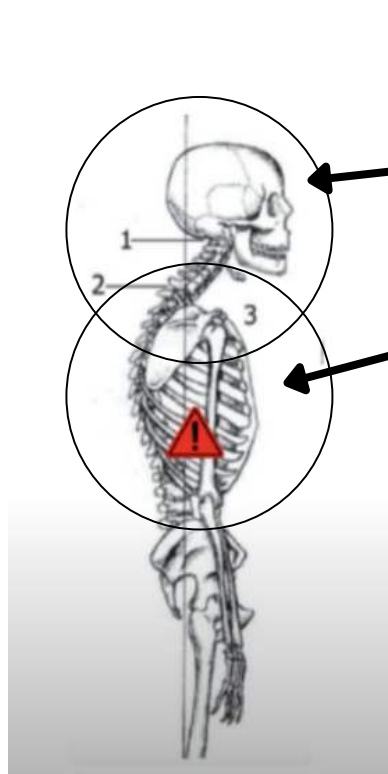
Our brain is constantly scanning our body to detect:

how we are negotiating the world...

...but also: is this body ready and capable for fight or flight!?

Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

EXAMPLE: Forward Head Position



A forward head position tends to also change the orientation of the rib cage

This then allows for less space for the lungs and diaphragm to expand

...which leads to

SHALLOW BREATHING

Shallow breathing - upregulates the nervous system and we feel tense and anxious
Elissa Epel, Ph.D.

*"The ability to turn and face in any direction is a survival function..."
When we lose range of motion at the neck the human being is in danger and his survival chances are suddenly decreased."
...the brain reacts with a fight or flight response!*

In other words: when you have a forward head position you might already be in a slight stress response BEFORE you ever get in the saddle.

It is clear to see how it then does not take much to set off a fear response and make you nervous in the saddle!

Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

STICKING A SPOOK - FEELING SOLID IN THE CANTER/LOPE

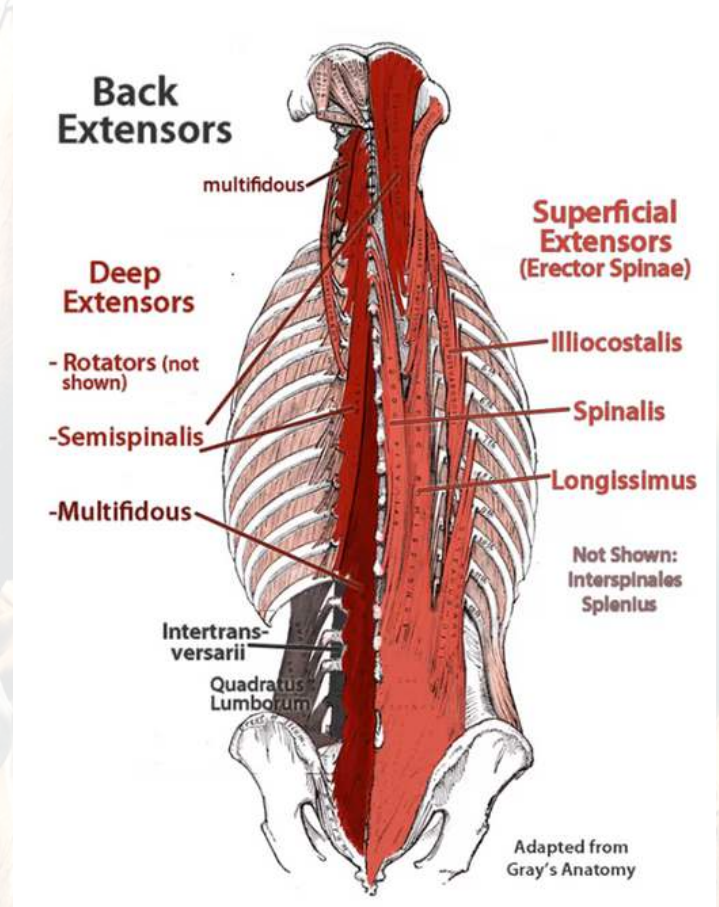
Our spine, when in proper and functional alignment,

- has a wonderful oscillation that allows us to easily follow our horses' movement
- has a powerful stabilization system built in
- and has what's called 'anticipatory action' (when it feels movement coming it automatically stabilizes before we even have to think)

Stiffness, crookedness and pain alter these wonderful traits:

Research has shown that:

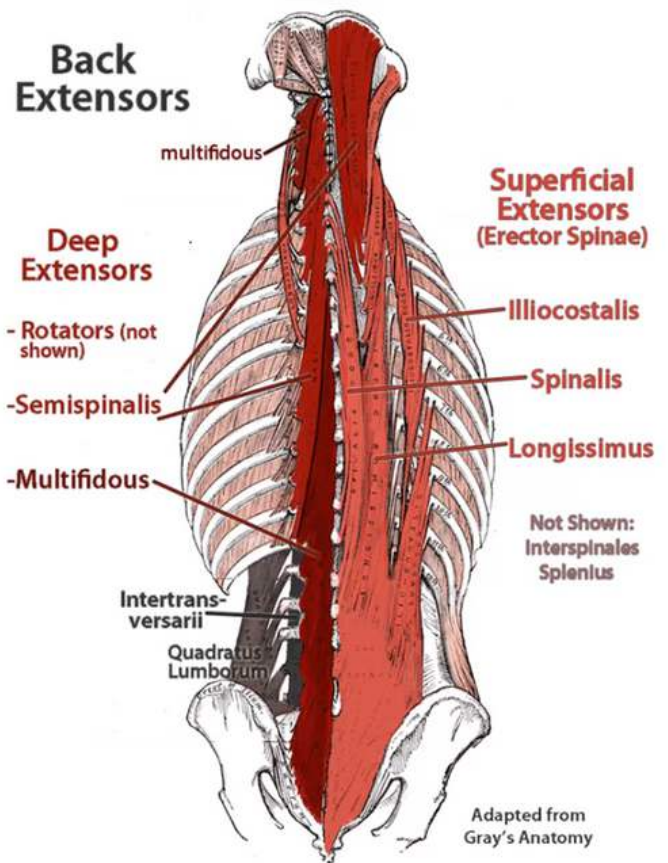
- in people with chronic back pain stabilizing spinal muscles in the area of back pain shut off and do not automatically reactivate once pain subsides (2005 McDonald and Jemmett).
- stabilizing spinal muscles do not function and activate in the same way as in people without back pain (2000 Horton)
- the body uses erector spinae as stabilizers instead of deeper postural muscles (such as multifidus) (2008 Cole and Grimshaw)



Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

People with back pain
use erector spinae
as stabilizers
instead of
deeper postural muscles

(2008 Cole and Grimshaw)



Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

The (much ignored) PAIN-CONFIDENCE CONNECTION

Fear of movement, or kinesiophobia

Chronic pain tends to have an element of fear attached to it, because its unpredictability and inherent unpleasantness has taught us to be wary.

The greater the fear, the more our brain and body works to keep us in 'fight or flight' mode.

"Fear of movement is positively associated with trunk stiffness."

Karayannis et al. 2013

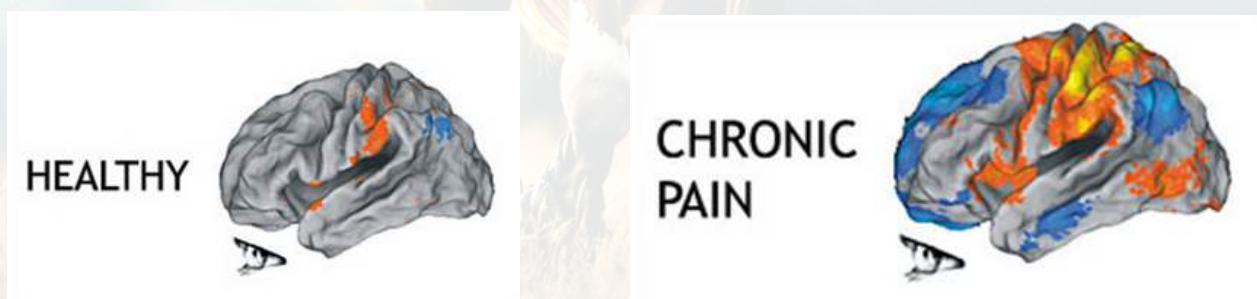
"The ability to turn and face in any direction is a survival function..."

When we lose range of motion at the neck the human being is in danger and his survival chances are suddenly decreased."

...the brain reacts with a fight or flight response!

Many of the areas that fire in chronic pain, also process thoughts, sensations, images, memories, movements, emotions, and beliefs - when they are not processing pain.

Norman Doidge MD



Credit: Northwestern University.

Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

The (much ignored) PAIN-CONFIDENCE CONNECTION

That observation explains why, when we are in pain:

- we can't concentrate or think well
- why we have sensory problems and often can't tolerate certain sounds and light
- why we can't move more gracefully
- and why we can't control our emotions very well and become irritable and have emotional outbursts

***The areas that regulate these activities
have been hijacked to process pain signal***

Major Brain Areas Where Pain Is Processed

Somatosensory 1 and 2:

Pain; touch, temperature sense, pressure sense, position sense, vibration sense, sensation of movement

Prefrontal Cortex

Pain; executive function, creativity, planning, empathy, action, emotional balance, intuition

Anterior Cingulate

Pain; emotional self-control, sympathetic control, conflict detection, problem solving

Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!

Major Brain Areas Where Pain Is Processed

Posterior Parietal Lobe

Pain; sensory, visual, auditory perception; mirror neurons, internal location of stimuli, location of external space

Supplementary Motor Area

Pain; planned movement, mirror neurons

Amygdala

Pain; emotional memory, emotional response, pleasure, sight, smell, emotional extremes

Major Brain Areas Where Pain Is Processed

Insula

Pain; quiets the amygdala, temperature, itch, empathy, emotional self-awareness, sensual touch, connects emotion with bodily sensation, mirror neurons, disgust

Posterior Cingulate

Pain; visuospatial cognition, autobiographical memory retrieval

Hippocampus

Pain; emotional memory, emotional response, pleasure, sight, smell, emotional extremes

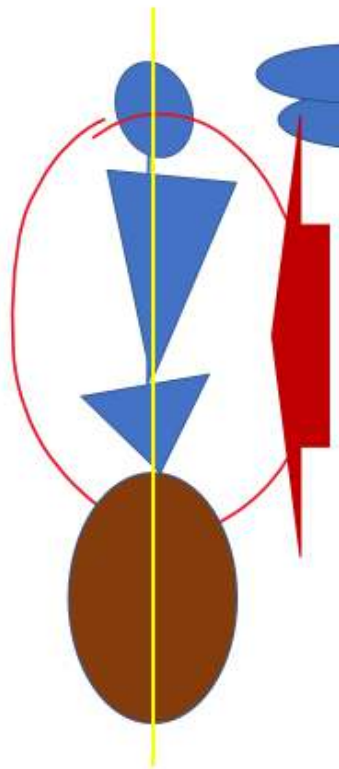
Major Brain Areas Where Pain Is Processed

Orbital Frontal Cortex

Pain; evaluates if something is pleasant vs. unpleasant, empathy, understanding, emotional attunement

Norman Doidge MD

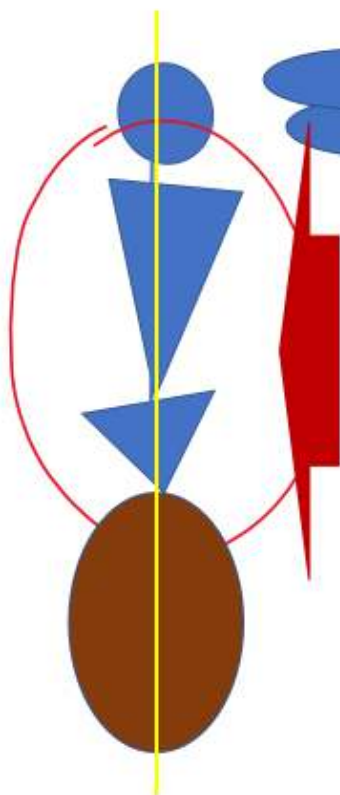
Confidence ... is CERTAINTY!



What if...???

THIS doesn't just make your brain feel unsafe...

...it also makes your horse feel unsafe



What if...???

Horses are about balance –

- Survival
- Safety
- Efficiency

A background image of a rider on a horse in a field, with the text overlaid. The rider is wearing a helmet and riding gear, and the horse is in motion. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grass under a bright sky.

The Physiology of **Rider Confidence**

**A balanced, supple and confident body
is the KEY to making your brain feel safe
...and MAKING YOUR HORSE FEEL SAFE
AND UNDERSTOOD!**

**And that is what makes a fabulous
riding partnership!**

**TO CONNECT WITH ME AND CHAT ABOUT
HOW TO WORK TOGETHER
WWW.RIDERFITNESS.COM/CHAT**

The Physiology of **Rider Confidence**

Notes:



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Notes:

