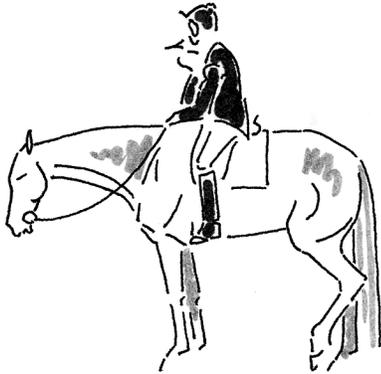


SETTING GOALS

It should be the rider who develops the thought, the rider's mind that gives a signal to his body, the rider's body that gives a signal to the horse, and finally, the horse that executes the



command. None of this is possible without clear goals.

We always say that we must have a goal toward which to work – and this, of course, is true. But what is the goal? What does it look like? How should it feel? When we ride around without a clearly defined goal, then we are just **letting** things happen instead of **making** them happen.

If there is no goal, there cannot be a plan or a system. As a result, the horse does not get clear signals telling him what to do, and he is forced to guess. Most likely the horse will guess incorrectly, which is often misinterpreted by the rider as disobedience. In turn, the rider feels he has to correct the horse.

Riding without goals is the same as setting a trap for the poor horse. The horse should be ridden so that the rider tells the horse what to do, instead of letting the horse keep the rider busy responding. Imagine a lesson in which your trainer did not tell you what he expected you to do, and then criticized you when you failed to meet his expectations. You would lose your self-confidence completely. The same thing applies to the horse.

Perhaps we have defined goals for ourselves, such as:

- I want to ride Grand Prix.
- I want to be the best in my stable.
- I want to compete in the Olympics.
- I want to cover my walls with ribbons and medals.

But these are not the goals by which to educate a horse. To set appropriate goals, it is necessary to have great insight and understanding for what dressage really is, and of what it consists. ***But the greatest challenge is not in setting the goals. It is to avoid losing sight of the goals and ending up on the wrong track.***

If we decide to drive somewhere – from Seattle to Houston, for example - we don't just get in the car and drive until we find a sign that says "Houston". We look at a map to decide how to get there and through which places we have to go to arrive at the destination. The same thing applies when we set out to educate the horse.

Let us assume the goal is to take the horse to Grand Prix. Such a big goal can be compared to building a house. This work must be split up into many steps, which when followed, lead horse and rider along as straight a path as possible to the goal. This is the path along which we travel to educate the horse.

Once we have identified and named all the steps, and have clearly decided what each step consists of and what to expect of each one, we can begin the work. From this point on, we must stay on course. In other words, ***while we sit on the horse, one eye looks at the next step while the other eye keeps the 'finished house' in focus.***

If it occasionally happens that we get off the track - we don't travel the straightest path towards the goal - there is, of course, an explanation. It takes a long time to educate a horse, and the distance between the steps seems far sometimes, which can be frustrating. Completing one single step may take a significant amount of time and a lot of very hard work. This is necessary to build up muscles, create suppleness and balance, and to teach the horse to learn to understand certain aids. This is all necessary in order for everything to feel right.

In order to regain something that got lost along the way, sometimes we need to go back and work for a while with movements or basics that we thought we had completed long ago. There are many reasons this can happen. The horse can lose his confidence or become tense and nervous because we have asked too much of him. This is a common situation for many horses when they are learning flying changes or other movements that make large demands on them.

These types of situations are the ones that make us leave the straight path, causing us to end up in the ditch. The horse becomes nervous and makes mistakes because he is tense, and then the rider starts to make too many corrections. Of course it is not always wrong to make corrections. Sometimes it is very necessary, but we should try to find another way when possible. We should avoid continually correcting the horse towards the goal and focusing on the negative, in the hope

that the horse will finally figure out what he should do by himself.

When you are ready to set your own goals and organize your work, you will find the various forms found in the chapter in the section (Setting Goals and Developing a System) called Planning your Training to be very helpful.

It is important to be realistic when setting training goals. At the same time, don't think that you or your horse will be unable to achieve goals that may seem out of reach today. I have seen horses I thought would never go far, but because their owners loved them and believed in them so much, they managed to succeed far beyond my expectations.

I would like to tell you a little story:

Some years ago, a new student began working with me. Her name was Maria and she had inherited her sister's jumper. His name was Klarino and he was 11 years old and 15.3 hands. Klarino was too hot to make a good jumper. Maria was 17 and wanted to ride dressage. Many horse people had advised Maria's family not to buy Klarino because his right front leg was very crooked. However, he never became lame on that leg, or any other leg for that matter.

Maria wanted to take lessons, but the only time I had available was once a week on Thursday evenings at 10:00 p.m. in a place rather far from Maria and Klarino's home. The first year the lessons were long. Transitions were the only thing we worked on because as soon as Maria lightened the contact, Klarino took off at full speed. But we didn't give up. Maria's family was not well-off, so her saddle was inexpensive and her arena at home was narrow, un-level and full of rocks. Klarino would not stand still and hated to do lateral work. This was not an easy project. Maria's father, who often came along to the lessons, shook his head. He couldn't understand our patience with the horse.

A few years passed and some of the problems were solved. Then the time came to teach Klarino tempi changes. This really set us back. I could hardly mention the word change and he would run away. But finally, we were successful. In competitions, Klarino did well at 4th Level, but Maria wanted more. She wanted to go on to FEI.

I was convinced that Klarino would not be able to learn passage, and I said so to Maria. But she didn't take me seriously and so we tried anyway. It was horrible! But Maria did not give up easily, and after a while Klarino could actually do passage. Part of the story is that Klarino's hind legs were quite weak and so unstable, we were afraid to school canter pirouettes. We had to be really careful and go very slowly, but one day he could do them too. Strangely enough there was never a problem with the piaffe, and we were happy for that.

Maria was now 19. It was time for the Swedish Championships for Young Riders. In their first class Klarino spent most of his time on his hind legs, but Maria handled it well and everyone applauded her at the end of the ride. In the next two classes Klarino behaved so well that he placed in each class. They ended up number two in the Swedish Championships. Maria and Klarino were now on the Swedish Young Riders' team.

Next was the European Championships in Germany. Maria and Klarino did not place, but they ended up best of the Swedish riders. We went home again, and soon it was time to try Grand Prix for the first time, at a big competition in Gothenburg. The class before Grand Prix was the Intermediare II, on Friday afternoon. Klarino was disobedient and tense, and even reared several times. The Grand Prix was the next day. I wanted to scratch but Maria had no such intentions. I was sure that Maria would be tense and nervous come Saturday morning, but once again I was completely wrong! She met me in the cafeteria with a big smile on her face. She told me that she could easily have been angry at Klarino for his behavior the previous day. "But" she said, "I woke up at four o'clock this morning and thought about it and decided I should be happy to have a horse that at 16 is so well and happy that he has the energy to be so naughty. I got up extra early and went running with him in the woods."

I was very surprised, but also very impressed by her attitude. Their debut in Grand Prix went well. Klarino kept his cool and executed a beautiful test. They then went on to several of the open Swedish Championships. I could go on telling you more about Maria and Klarino, but it would take too long. Klarino went on competing with Maria until he was 20, and spent the last 5 years with my wife, who was lucky enough to have him as her schoolmaster.

I have learned a lot from my association with Maria and Klarino. Maria was always happy, positive and open to all possibilities. She looked ahead and was not the least bit concerned with what others thought. She found a way to ride her horse that suited both of them.

These many years of working with Maria and Klarino have taught me that one should never give up just because some things are difficult.