



POSSIBILITIES FARM
PARTNERING WITH HORSES TO
BRING OUT THE BEST IN HUMANS

Follow Your Guiding Stars: Horse Wisdom for a New Year

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Horse Wisdom

Horses are amazing. They have unique individual personalities and skills, yet work well together for the good of their herd. They have incredible strength and gentleness. They are prey animals, who are hardwired to scan for predators or other dangers to their survival, but in the absence of an immediate threat they will spend their days peacefully grazing. When faced with danger, they know how to respond in the moment, then how to release stress and immediately return to peace. They also know how to make themselves feel good and will choose their own delight if they have the freedom to do so.

Horses don't agonize over daily decisions. If they did, a herd wouldn't survive an attack from a predator. Horses have some primary guiding stars that affect their choices in a wide variety of situations, including:

- **Survival** - As prey animals, horses continually scans the environment to detect threats to their survival. If a horse becomes concerned, the horse will turn its full attention to the prospective threat and assess it. The rest of the herd will do the same. If the threat is determined to be real then the herd will take action - for example by moving to safety. A horse that is concerned for its survival cannot be bribed by treats - they will choose survival over delight.
- **Responsibility** - Horses also have a great sense of responsibility to their herd. It is important for them to fill their roles in the herd and to rely on other horses to do the same. Although some horses are able to adapt to life alone, horses will be more comfortable with other horses because they know they can count on their herd and don't have to do everything themselves.
- **Joy** - If there is no current threat and no immediate role to be played in the herd, such as watching over other sleeping horses, horses will choose to do what brings them joy. Given the freedom to do so, they enjoy the moment, grazing, rolling, running, grooming each other or just napping in the sun. They choose delight.

Human Thinking

Humans have our own set of individualized guiding stars, the priorities and beliefs that influence our decisions and perceptions. Often we are not fully conscious of those guiding stars because they have become so engrained in who we are that we have lost sight of them. Humans also tend to distort our guiding stars over time, such as by perceiving imaginary threats to our survival as real and giving them undue weight, or by making them unnecessarily rigid, such as by taking on unnecessary responsibilities because we are uncomfortable saying no.

The guiding stars also may shift as we go through transitions in our lives. I recently realized, for example, that my career decisions have been heavily influenced by my guiding star of being a mother. Now that my daughter is preparing to go to college, that star is changing because the flexible schedule to meet the bus when she was younger or to attend school events is no longer relevant. These times of transition can be disconcerting if we don't recognize the need to examine and reset our guiding stars.

Hoofprints to Discover and Follow Your Guiding Stars in 2019

We always have the ability to set or adjust our guiding stars at any time and the beginning of a new year is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on what we would like them to be in 2019. Take some time to explore these questions during the first week of the new year and write down what you discover.

1. What are your Guiding Stars? What priorities or beliefs guide your decisions and perceptions? What are the things that you consider first in making major life decisions? What do you consider in making smaller decisions, such as how you spend your day? Do your guiding stars for big decisions match the ones you use for daily decisions? Often we give more thought to major decisions and may not be aware that how we spend our days isn't consistent with how we truly want to spend our lives. What adjustments could you make to align your days with your guiding stars?

2. Has Imaginary Fear Become a Guiding Star? What are the monsters hiding in your closet - those things that set off your alarm bells and cause you to become concerned for your survival? Are you actually facing direct threats today, for example a serious illness, or are you giving real weight to imaginary fears? Fear can be useful to help us make good decisions in certain circumstances, for example, choosing not to engage in truly dangerous behaviors, but fear also can become overwhelming and all-consuming, encouraging us to base all decisions on avoiding danger, even when the dangers aren't real. Do you approach threats like a horse does - remaining aware but only responding when directly faced with a real problem or has imaginary fear become a guiding star?

3. What Would Your Life Look Like in 2019 if Thriving was a Guiding Star for You? What would it mean for you to choose joy this year, to relish every day? What would that be like on a daily, weekly, monthly basis? What choices can you make to help yourself thrive? For example, what would you need to feed yourself? Not just what would you eat and drink, but what experiences, thoughts and beliefs would you need to give yourself? Make a list of what nourishes you in any way, body, mind, or spirit. Commit to giving yourself what you need to thrive in 2019 and carve time out in your schedule to do it, even if only for a few minutes a day.