

Speaker 1 ([00:00:07](#)):

You're listening to the journey on podcast with Warwick Schiller. Warwick is a horseman trainer, international clinician, and off whose mission is to help people achieve a deeper connection with their horses through his transformational training program.

Warwick Schiller ([00:00:32](#)):

G'day everyone. Welcome back to the journey on podcast. I'm your host Warwick Schiller. And you know, the universe works in strange ways, but I get people send me suggestions for podcast guests and I'll, I'll look 'em up. And you know, sometimes I'm like, I gotta have 'em on. Or sometimes I'm like, yeah, they're pretty cool. Like hopefully I run into 'em one day or hopefully an opportunity to interact with that person comes along at some point in time. And I've heard a number of people suggest young fellow from the UK named Ben Atkinson and Ben, someone suggested Ben. And so I looked him up and I saw videos of him doing Liberty with like seven horses and then Roman riding while jumping with two or three horses on either side loose on other side of the horses that he's jumping while Roman riding.

Warwick Schiller ([00:01:26](#)):

And then I saw some high school dressage stuff, and then I saw some in hand stuff like they do at the Spanish writing school. And I thought, well, that, that, dude's pretty cool. And I'm thinking, yeah, if I get, I, I don't have a direct link with him, but if I, I get a chance one day to connect with him, I wouldn't mind chatting with him on the podcast. And so recently I was I presented not presented, but I put a video into a an online what would you call an online horse expo in the UK recently called the horseman showcase. And they had a, they had a like a lib competition or something or other, and they asked me to be a, an online judge for it. And I had to get on this zoom call to, to do this judging thing, which I didn't know a whole lot about and to get on the zoom call.

Warwick Schiller ([00:02:15](#)):

And there's two other guest judges on there. And one is tick Maynard, who is a, as you probably know, is a previous guest on the podcast. And then the other guys, this Ben Atkinson. So he's my in. And I'm like, you know, and I get chatting with him and I said, Hey, yeah. How would you, I dunno if I asked him to be on the podcast first? I think he actually said, Hey, I've listened to every episode of the podcast. I love it. It's awesome. I love what you're doing. And so I thought, well, Hey, would you like to be on my podcast? And he said, yes. So that was my in with Ben Atkinson. An amazing young man he's only 28 and he's done a lot of stuff and I really love his outlook on oh, horses and life in general. So here is my interview with Ben Atkinson and I'm sure you'll love it. Just as much as I can. Ben Atkinson welcome to the journey on podcast. No,

Ben Atkinson ([00:03:10](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. It's such a treat to be on it and not listening to it for, for a change.

Warwick Schiller ([00:03:17](#)):

Yeah, we, this is actually round two. We tried round one a few days ago. And for some reason you ended up in the same spinning wheel of death that Ruper Iza ended up in. So maybe there's some maybe some of there's that shaman energy coming out of you. So we met, we met the other day on, there was a, there was a, a online horse ex Bowie thing called a horseman showcase. And I got asked to to do some video for that earlier this year and then recent. And that, that came out recently, but they had a, they

had a some sort of a competition on there for like a Liberty type competition. And they asked me to, to be a judge on it. And so I get on there to be a judge on it the other day and tick Maynard, who a previous podcast guest was on there.

Warwick Schiller ([00:04:07](#)):

And then you were on there and that was that's the first time I met you. It was so cool because I'd had a lot of people send me stuff and say, Hey, you should have this guy on the podcast. And I think that's actually where I first maybe that's know. I think I'd seen some of your stuff floating around the, the social media thing, but then when people started sending me, Hey, you should get this guy on the podcast. They kind of looked up and I thought, yeah, he'd be cool. And then I just forgot about it. And then of course you popped up right there in front of me on the screen and then told me that you were a avid podcast listener and you wanna be on it. So here we are.

Ben Atkinson ([00:04:42](#)):

It's, it's great fun. I think you actually, the first time I reckon that you saw me, would've been, I can't remember which of the podcast it was, but I stole a quote from you and tagged you in it. I, I still adore it. Now, if you are depressed, you're living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are peace, you're living in the present,

Warwick Schiller ([00:04:59](#)):

It was too that's right. You tagged me. That's right. And then you were doing some sort of crazy Liberty Roman riding with about 27 horses or something or other I'm like, holy cow, this dude just, and that's not my quote. That's, that's from a Chinese philosopher named LASU who lived about 800 BC. But anyway, I'll, I'll take it. You'll take

Ben Atkinson ([00:05:20](#)):

It. Absolutely. The other, the other thing I have to do, and I, I, I do need to thank you for this is that if, when people come to me and they say, I have no idea where to start with horsemanship, and I'm like, right, you wanna go on the journey on podcast on Spotify and you gotta find the, the 12 rules of training. And listen to that. I say, if you listen to that, that's as good a start as you could ever have in a, to being a horseman.

Warwick Schiller ([00:05:42](#)):

Oh, thank you. The principles of training. Yeah. That, you know, that came about just, you know, I think cuz we, you know, we've, we, we did a podcast at the, that didn't work. So I know a bit more about you than I did when we first got on there. But I think my brain works a bit like yours too. Like I'm a, I'm an analyzer and you know, I that's, that's what made me the whole principles of training, you know, like doing clinics and helping people and then watching, you know, watching other people at horse expos and reading books and watching videos and all sorts of stuff. I just started to categorize things into, oh, well that, that particular exercise is the same as that exercise only different, but it's got the same principle and I, I just, you know, I just categorize stuff in my head for years. And then I finally started putting names to it, like at clinics. And then I finally got to where, you know what, I cannot find any more principles, anything that falls outside that or that I'm like that. So yeah. Thanks for that. That's pretty cool. But let's talk about Ben Atkinson. So what is it exactly for the listeners out there? What exactly do you do these days?

Ben Atkinson ([00:06:47](#)):

So we've got a company called the Atkinson action horses, cause it's a collaboration with the whole family and we provide horses for film, television and live events. So this could be anything from, you know, like a display, you'd see a jumping competition or a rodeo or all the way to, if you are watching, you know, like those period dramas pole, dark Peaky, blinders, you know, all those old fashioned things or TV commercials, anything like that, which means that the job's very varied. Not only for us for the, but also for the horses and it, yes. It's great fun.

Warwick Schiller ([00:07:20](#)):

And you guys provide horses for those, do you? But so your email is Mark Atkinson, stunt horses. So Mark's your dad.

Ben Atkinson ([00:07:32](#)):

Yeah. And dad Mark's my dad.

Warwick Schiller ([00:07:33](#)):

Okay. And so do you guys do stunts too?

Ben Atkinson ([00:07:37](#)):

So we do stunts with horses. So, so there's a thing called the stunt register, which basically it's a, it's a test that you do where you, so that you are almost, if I describe it as being like the black belt in five or six different disciplines, you such as high diving, scuba diving gymnastics, horse, riding cars, that sort of thing. And it means that basically you, you are now shown to be skilled and proficient enough for someone to ensure you to blow yourself up in a car, on a film set. Now we are not on the stunt register because the thing is when we specialize in horse work, the director will send me a script. I got sent one yesterday and I've gotta have a horse in a first world war battlefield laying in the floor in the mud. And these three riders Gallup, and they feel sorry, room.

Ben Atkinson ([00:08:20](#)):

So they've gotta jump off and save him. And there's gas, canister fall and all sorts. Now it sounds, firstly, you've got the stuff going off, so you're gonna need a stunt, man. It can't be an actor it's gonna be dangerous now that he could be the best stunt man in the world, but he's not gonna know didly squat about how to keep a horse laying down and keep it calm while this fake smoke and explosions going off. So that's when we'll get jumped in for the stunt dump and equally sometimes an actor. So when an actor comes to us for a, a film, the first thing we do is assess them. And then we say to the film, okay, this actor can walk or this actor can walk TRO and canter, that sort of thing. And if an actor is say only able to walk because they've not had any lessons really then the director says, and at the end of this scene, he gallops off cuz he's furious. Then one of us will jump on and do the, do the faster work. So sometimes it's very simple, things like that. Other times it can be like you say your cool stuff, Gallop up to the edge of a cliff skid stop in a horse as a helicopter flies in front of you to get a cool shot, you know, all that, all that jazz.

Warwick Schiller ([00:09:22](#)):

So have, so can you name drop here? Have, have you, have you like done done stunt work on something I may have seen?

Ben Atkinson ([00:09:31](#)):

Oh my goodness. We've did some sort of what I would call crowd stunt work on clash of the Titans and rat the Titans. So the remakes they just did of them. I, my first job I did actually, after I left school, was I rode on the Steven Spielberg film Warhorse. We were doing a lot on that. And then mainly for us to say period, dramas, pole, dark Victoria, Peaky, blinders, or creatures. Great and small, all that more. Okay.

Warwick Schiller ([00:09:54](#)):

So I'm a huge pinky blinders fan and a huge pole dark fan. My wife didn't watch Peaky blinders, but we watched pole dark religiously. Were you on that?

Ben Atkinson ([00:10:05](#)):

Yeah, so I was Aiden's double for the first two years really. And I tell you fantastic thing about me and Aiden really, really get on. I've not obviously we've, don't film that anymore, so I've not spoken to him for ages. So I'm not gonna claim that we're best mates, but we got on really well at the time. And Aiden will forever have a special place in my heart as like, this is what actor should be like. So he, he turned upon the farm on his assessment day. He walked straight up to me and my dad and said, right, I'll tell you straight, the films told you I can ride. Cause I told you that I can't, I've never sat on a horse in my life. I'm willing to put the work in, but I to do as much of my own riding as possible.

Ben Atkinson ([00:10:39](#)):

So we were like brilliant, easy. So he actually made an effort, the last sort of six to eight weeks before Paul doc started, he had all his, like, you know, your dress rehearsals, your script, all of that. But he made sure that he came from London to our home in new Yorkshire, which is about four hours in a car to train every weekend, keeping on it. And so for the first two seasons, we were doubling for him. But by the, the rest of the seasons on, from that he did all of his own riding. He was actually a, really a very sympathetic rider to the horses and very good at, for example, if we were doing a, a, a scene where he had to Gallop along the beach, after two or three times, he would off his own back, go to the director and be say, Hey, this horse is galloped a lot. Now we're, we're taking it easy on him after this.

Warwick Schiller ([00:11:29](#)):

Well, that's good to hear cuz I, yeah, I thought he was a pretty cool dude and, and yeah, I, I remember watching him think, and this guy can ride, right. Because there's, you know, there's, there's not scenes of him just galloping away or it could be someone else there's scenes of him galloping towards the hammer and stuff and yeah,

Ben Atkinson ([00:11:43](#)):

Yeah. He had the, the horse we had for him show us, he was great. He was a big Irish draft and he was well, before I move on, I'm gonna just sort of tag in that with the films. It's not just about say like, you know, like I've just said teaching a horse to lie down while less smoke machines and stuff. It goes on beyond that. So aid and Turner was playing captain pock in 17, 15 England. Now we pride ourselves on pairing the correct horse for the job. So you'll see a lot of film companies Andalusians and they're like, Fris cuz there's big necks and there's big hair and it looks great. But for a gentleman who isn't very rich in England to be riding an Alucian in 1750, I mean it's not happening, it'd be the equivalent of importing a Ferrari. And so we chose him an Irish draft thinking, you know, this means this is a horse. He could work in the land. You actually see him this horse as well throughout the series. And so that was all chosen.

And then going on to picking the tack for the horse military tack and bridals and saddles things that could have been SCA scavenged from the American war of independence battlefield, which is where the character is meant to have come home from. So that's all part of our job as well, making sure that the film chooses correct horses, tap all of that sort of thing to be historically correct, but also practical.

Warwick Schiller ([00:13:00](#)):

Well thank you cuz horse ho horse movies drive me nuts when they've got the, you know, they've got stuff on the horses that wasn't even invented yet.

Ben Atkinson ([00:13:08](#)):

Yeah. I mean sometimes you have to because sometimes they'll want something doing except dangerous. So John, if you're doing dangerous carriage work I'm I love to be historically correct as much as the next man, but I'm not gonna use traces running from the collar to the carriage, with the hook that go through the eye of the leather. I'm gonna have me some nice synthetic quick release just in case anything. Anything goes per shaped.

Warwick Schiller ([00:13:33](#)):

Yeah. Sounds great. Hey, what about PIY blinders? Did you do stuff on PIY

Ben Atkinson ([00:13:36](#)):

Blinders? Yeah, so we did PIY blinders seasons three and four. So we had great fun on that. What was really lovely with that is Killian Murphy who plays the lead in PKIs just such an easygoing guy listened to absolutely everything that that you wanted him to do. But one of the guys who was little bit more difficult, I've I, sorry, shame. Say I dunno the guy's name, but he plays Arthur, Shelby and Arthur. He yeah. Well he's a little bit of a method actor. Do you know what I mean? So he takes the, the role, but he's kind of in that all day, you break for lunch, he's still Arthur, Shelby. And so he got on this horse now the man's barely rid and we had, it was the scene, you know, when they go deer hunting. So they're all mounted and they're all out on the MOS and we're trying to give him little bits of help to make sure he doesn't go too wrong.

Ben Atkinson ([00:14:26](#)):

And he's like, oh no, I'll ride up a and be like, yeah, the character does you don't. And so that's where my dad, so my, when we're filming, normally it's my father. He he's got the role as, and I think it's the coolest job title you'll find in the equine industry. When you are in charge of horses on a film set, your job is the horse master. That's what your job is. And it's not only making sure everything goes well, when you get an actor like that, who's like I can ride my dad walked up to the director and was like, I think you should get this shot in three takes because by the time these guys have run, pulled the horses around playing who's the best rider. These horses are gonna start to say, hang on. We know the job, we're going a different way. So it's, it's, it's all of that. It's balancing all of these, all the characters.

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:15](#)):

Wow. Yeah. I can see that guy, you know, almost happened to be a method actor to, to be Shelby, because he was full on wasn't he like that guy was

Ben Atkinson ([00:15:26](#)):

Yeah. Oh, terrifying. Yeah, absolutely terrifying.

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:30](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Like, like a psychopathic sort of thing. And the, and you know, the, the guy that played Tommy Shelby, when you mentioned him a minute ago and you said he was like, he would listen to everything you say. I can just imagine that guy looking you in the eye, listening to what you're saying. Cause his face was so expressive. Like he could say, yeah, he could say a lot without saying anything. You know what I mean?

Ben Atkinson ([00:15:56](#)):

Yeah. He's very, he's got one of those looks when someone looks at you and it looks through you. Oh yeah. He's very, very blessed, but so wonderful. You know, just one of the easiest people, one, one of the most lovely jobs in all ways. In fact, one of my favorite Paul dark stories have is when Tommy marries grace and they're rushing from the church in the storm, in the carriage, you mean? Yeah,

Warwick Schiller ([00:16:21](#)):

You said pole doc, you mean, oh,

Ben Atkinson ([00:16:23](#)):

Peaky, PE blinds, sorry. I mean, Peaky they had this cuz they're meant to be in the storm. In this carriage. They had a giant wind machine, which basically just imagine like the spin and propellor of an airplane just attached to this thing. And they had that on the back of a pickup and two guys, either side and they're throwing buckets of water and leaves into the wind machine as we drive this horse behind it. So it looks like it's all happening. Well, of course it's not very safe to have the actors doing that, but they didn't have a stunt woman there. And they were like blood. We need some one to double grace. My father's quite a small slight guy. And so when Tommy and grace are in the carriage on the way to the church in the storm, Mark Atkinson in a purple dress is grace, which is his claim to fame.

Warwick Schiller ([00:17:11](#)):

That's pretty cool. Yeah. I love, I love that show. You know, there was a line in that show. You know, you, you set 'em indigo that our first interaction apparently was when you shared something that I said, and it was, if you depressed your living in the past, if you're anxious, you're living in the future. If you are present or if you are, if you are peaceful, you're living in the present, there is a line late in the se that peak blind a series where Tommy Shelby has retired. Well, he's he, you know, he's not working, he's at home and he's driving, he's gone crazy. Been at home and someone, he said, he's going back to work. And I think it was his wife, maybe his mother, I can't remember someone says why. And he says, because I'm sick of sitting here thinking about me, thinking about my thinking. Yeah,

Ben Atkinson ([00:18:00](#)):

I get that. I underst

Warwick Schiller ([00:18:01](#)):

I love that line. I'm sitting here. I'm sick of me thinking about me, thinking about my thinking, like that's been in your head, isn't it? You know, I love that line. Yeah. I love that line anyway. So wow. We just jumped right in there to Paul dark and Peaky blinders. When you said that at the start, I thought, well,

that's, that's cool. I've seen both of those. Let's go back to those start of this. Where did the, how did you get, well, maybe we should go back to even further. How did your dad get into being a, a horse stunt guy? Like it's not, it's one of those, you know, it's one of those vocations that you don't just go, yeah. I'm gonna be a horse stunt guy. How did he get into

Ben Atkinson ([00:18:43](#)):

It? Yeah, it's definitely a, I fell into it job opposed to a dunno. You're not gonna see it in the newspaper. Right. So we had, we were dairy farmers and farmers. So as of myself, my father and my grandfather, who's 93, all on the same farm working away. And my father was working as a dairy farmer and an arable land farmer, but he'd always been a show jumper. So him and my grandfather had always bred horses. So my grandfather dropped out of school when he was 10 to plow with horses on the land. So that that's where sort of massive horse passion comes from. And he'd always been pretty handy with them and good with the horses. So because we didn't have a lot of money, my grandfather and father would breed show jumpers and bring them on and sell 'em and keep their best ones to try and get going.

Ben Atkinson ([00:19:29](#)):

And so when people saw my father having success with his horses, they would say, could you take my horse in for training for two weeks? Or could you back my youngster or teach my daughter? And so eventually, because as much as my grandfather, I would say is probably the only real farmer out of the lot of us because he loves, you know, he'll, he'll pull up the car on a journey and say, look how straight those furrows in that plow feed. Like I I'm not feeling it at all. And so my father had kept running the farm as a proper farm because my grandfather had worked so hard to build it up to that. But my mother who is completely disengaged from all of farming, she's a town girl. First time she came to the yard, apparently she came in a, a floor length, white fur coats.

Ben Atkinson ([00:20:14](#)):

Tolet her heels. It gives you an idea. She helped my dad with his horses once as a surprise. And she filled the hay nets with straw and put Haage down in the beds. So she said to him, look, if you don't, if you don't wanna do cows, let's sell 'em and do horses. And so he took the brave leap and started this riding school and track. And then some people that were coming for lessons who did historical battery enactments said, would we, could we hire the riding school horses that we have lessons on? Cause we like them to come and be in a battle at this event. So of course, as was the mantra, as you could say, of the Aton family at the start of this business, it was say yes, and figure it out later. So he said, of course you can hire the horses for this, for this event.

Ben Atkinson ([00:21:01](#)):

And thus the great training began. So my dad's got a and a 12 horse. So they were shooting them in the fields while they were working the horses to get them used to the gunfire, they made bonfires to get them used to smoke. They put plastic over the top of old milk churns to make drums used the silage wrap off the bales to make flags. And by the end of it, you know, these, these horses were the pretty, you know, they were battle if you like. So they went away and they, they did the job. Yeah, actually there is a little, I'll just tag this on. There's a small, funny story in that my dad was asked if he would like to ride in the battle. And of course he said, yeah, this is great, great fun. And he figured out pretty quickly that when you are riding along, you've got your sword.

Ben Atkinson ([00:21:46](#)):

And if, if you someone on the shoulder, then you've got them and it means they're dead. Well, he noticed quite quickly that as much work he'd done with the horses, the horses were fine with the muskets and they were fine with the cannons. But one thing that they were actually really struggling was with the drums. And we don't know why, but just that I have a theory that drums and applause have through horses cuz of the percussion. Mm. You feel it. And so he nearly got himself lynched in the beer tent later that day because he can't drown broke rank away from the rest of the T troop and killed everyone with a drum on both sides so that they wouldn't off put his horses. So anyway, so we've done this event, it's gone well, dad's been at his ed kicked in, in the beer tent.

Ben Atkinson ([00:22:25](#)):

It's been great. And someone said, could you, could we hire those sources through exactly the same thing, but for a TV type, for a film, for a, on a TV and a museum. And the rest is, I dunno, the rest is history. You just pick things up as you go along and you snowball along our mantra being you're only ever as good as your last job. It's no good saying to someone, but in 2003, I did like, it's nice for you, but realistically it's the last job. And so we just prep the horses as best we could turned up, turn up early, leave late smile in between and the rest. Yeah. The rest is history.

Warwick Schiller ([00:23:05](#)):

So that's the stunt part of it. But there's so much more to what you do. So, you know, when I've first, when you, when you tagged me in that, that thing on Facebook and you showed up there, you were doing, I don't know, maybe Liberty with a large group of horses or maybe Roman riding too while having some others Lusa. But since I've looked into who the hell Ben Atkinson is, you know, so I, I see you do a lot of Liberty stuff, Roman writing stuff, but then I see you do like high school dressage stuff. And then I see you do like the in hand stuff like they do in the Spanish writing school. I mean, you it's almost like those things. You can take a lifetime to learn each one of those. You've got all these skills plus do the stunt stuff and you're what 28, 28. Wow. How did, how did all that happen? Many how'd you get into yeah. Where let's talk about your start. How'd you get into it?

Ben Atkinson ([00:24:09](#)):

Oh, my G well, riding and riding and driving horses is something I've done for as long as I can remember, my dad still stands by that. I'm the only child he ever knew that had a Shetland pony that was fully clipped out and shot all around because I used to just can around everywhere on her. We've just in the beginning, I followed my father's footsteps. So I, I grew up round horses. My grandfather taught me how to drive. Dad taught me how to ride and I followed his footsteps into competitive show jumping and competitive. Like I think you guys call it hunter showing. Yep. In the Tweed and stuff. What do you guys call it? I liked just showing.

Warwick Schiller ([00:24:49](#)):

Okay. Yep.

Ben Atkinson ([00:24:51](#)):

So I, I liked that and I did that, but I was getting, I would get very bored because my horse world was very linear and very competitive, but my dad's horse world did everything that he did was very varied and very wonderful. And so I came across the, the Spanish side of things probably first because when I



was very young on all the film sets, they always import Spanish trainers to train horses, to rear and lay down. And, and I was always around them, which was, which was fantastic. And so you sort of, the, the seed is planted for it to germinate later in life. And not only planted in the way that it gives you interest, but also shows you that it's possible. I think seeing that something is possible with horses is such a big thing because you, if you can't break the barrier in your brain, you are never gonna do it for the horse as well.

Ben Atkinson ([00:25:38](#)):

So we're going on with that? We're going filming with that. I'm exposed to this world. And along that road, I got to see Lorenzo. Lorenzo's the French guy you see with all the white horses. The big distinction is Lorenzo's the one that stands on him. Jean Frans is the one who's on the floor with him. That's how you generally tell him apart. That's say, that's say, and of course Lozo standing on these two horses is he Gallop around? I'm about eight or nine years old at this point. And I have two white show jumping ponies at home. So the child's logic is that he's standing on white horses. I have white horses. The key ingredient is white horses. All I have to do is do it. And they were absolute saints. My poor parents had the shock of their life as they came out and I stood on them galloping round.

Ben Atkinson ([00:26:21](#)):

And for a long time, I was hammering onto my dad saying, this is what I wanna do. I wanna perform. So my ponies got taken to an event because we were actually doing some Roman racing on a with a historical chariot. So they're on a yoke. Do you know how you'd see cattle driven? Yep. Yep. Because that's how they used to have it. So we had my ponies there cause they bros only had horses between about 11 and 13. And because they were there on an evening, my dad let me ride round the beer tent, where everyone was on a party standing on my two horses and the officials loved how much people loved it. A drunk crowds, always a easy one to please. But they said, yeah, fantastic. So we have an empty gap where we've gotta get one set of reenactors out of the arena and a another setting.

Ben Atkinson ([00:27:03](#)):

And if you go, if you wanna go in with your ponies there and can around, you'd do it now in my mind, it was the best performance I've ever done in my life. Looking back at pictures, I wanna slap myself and give myself a load of technique tips, but we just we'll look past that. And what it actually led to is English heritage, who was the company that were, we were working for there, they run all, you know, the castles and stuff in, in this country, keep it alive for people. And so they said, actually, we really like this. We've got a proposition for you. There was myself and another guy who I trained with called Zachary Roberts. And they said, we'll pay for you two guys to learn how to trick ride likes. If you do us two years of free shows to me, it was a, it was a bargain.

Ben Atkinson ([00:27:44](#)):

And so that's what we did. So then I was introduced to the wonder and chaos of GDO, Louie, who was my, my master. If you like, if I was his apprentice, I worked with him solely for two years and then did another two years working with him on different projects. And he is the most phenomenal man in every word where and think of it. I mean, he, he cooks like a Michelin star chef. He's a salsa dancing instructor. He's done every job in circus. You could imagine different acrobatic acts and all sorts, but he ran away with cross acts when he was 14 years old. And so I was trained in the, in the traditional methods. Now this is something that was fantastic for me in my learning, but made it very hard. Because for example, if your trick riding, you have very pointed toes.

Ben Atkinson ([00:28:30](#)):

It's all about keeping your, you cleanse your butt cheeks, clench your thighs, lock the knees, lock out the, the hands. So everything's pointed because you imagine, if you try and move a bent limb, it moves like a piece of rope because there's too many bendy bits. Whereas if you are moving a straight limb, it's like moving and I in bar. So you can move it a lot more safely and efficiently. So if my toes came up, when he was riding around, you'd get a crack on the top of the foot to point the toes. Or if you slouch, the whip would crack underneath your chin. So you'd sit up. He was very, you know, very, very strict, but he taught me a lot of lessons in life, not only about business and about horse and trick riding, but also just being a man. I remember the first time I sat chatting back at him in the way that only a 14 year old can do when you are entitled and know everything.

Ben Atkinson ([00:29:19](#)):

And he grabs me by the Scruff of my neck. And he's like, you know, I'm, I'm not your friend and I'm not your dad. You like, if you carry on speaking to me this way, you're gonna get a, you're gonna get a fist in the chops. So it was a rude awakening for me. But I tell you what, I think it was one of the best things that ever happened, because suddenly you realize, oh, life doesn't work in the same way that when you are with a child, you know, I mean, I'm the most spoiled child in the world by both my parents, whether they admit it or not. And so I think having someone like that just to say, oh, here's how the world works was very, very good for me.

Warwick Schiller ([00:29:54](#)):

So you started working with him when you were 14. Yeah. And you did that for two years. Yeah. And weren't you telling me the other day that he, he like, as far as Ko go, there's different titles and he's like the, the whoop.

Ben Atkinson ([00:30:08](#)):

Yeah. So, so traditionally in circus a Kosack is called Gigi. So what we call trick riding in Russian is non ajika, which honestly, we should keep that word. It sounds much better. That's that's very cool word. But JIT is the word for a trick rider. And he was known as a, a super gigit because generally a trick rider will do tricks, split into one of the quadrants. So there are balancing tricks. So they would be for example, like a handstand or shoulder stand or standing on the saddle hanging tricks. So we were, would call them wings. You guys, I think would call them fender hangs and stuff like that, where you are wrapping their stir pleather around your leg so that you could hang off the side of the horse. Then you've got your vaulting tricks, basically anything where you're going from seated feet, touch the floor, bounce.

Ben Atkinson ([00:30:56](#)):

You could land on the neck facing backwards, or go from side to side on the horse. And then the ultimate it tricks, which is their climbing tricks and the climbing tricks. There are only two. And one is to go under the neck of the galloping horse up the other side and back into the saddle. And one is to do under the belly. Now, when I met, he was the only man in the United Kingdom who could perform under the belly. And since then I, his, he still does it. But then that was the, that was the pinnacle of the career with him. He taught me how to ride under the belly. So that was

Warwick Schiller ([00:31:30](#)):

You. You've done that. Yeah.

Ben Atkinson ([00:31:32](#)):

Yeah. I can. I'll send you a WhatsApp video and

Warwick Schiller ([00:31:35](#)):

I've done, please do. Wow. I've seen that. I've seen video that I'm like, he's not, oh you. Yeah. Oh my God. He's cause the first time I saw it, I no idea what the guy was doing. And he goes down one side and I'm thinking, he's gonna hang underneath it. This is crazy. Or hang on. He's not, oh my goodness. He came up the other side. Yeah, that's amazing. Yeah.

Ben Atkinson ([00:31:54](#)):

I think one of the, the hardest things that under the belly, isn't actually the trick. So if you've got good grip strength and not to be crude, but if you've got the balls to do it, the, the hard part's finding the right horse, because horses will do one of two things, 80% of horses. When you actually drop underneath them will stop dead. They just stop. They're just like what earth, because you are actually, when you are underneath the, the horse is El bow at the top of his front legs is rocking you backwards with every stride they have to push against you. You can feel the cannon bone coming flat against your back and sometimes the back feet. So there's a lot for the horse to keep moving with. The other 20% of horses will clear off into the next county. And they're the ones you wanna stay away from.

Ben Atkinson ([00:32:50](#)):

So that was a lot more about what he was teaching me with it and just being about swift and, and out conscious thought. So that's another thing that probably taught me, ties nicely into the under the belly sort of conversation is this idea of flow state being able to do things without conscious thought. So if we a great example that I always love that I think feels like it helps people understand it. If they've never felt it themselves is during when England had her big empire, when she was using, you know, red coat with muskets and things. One of the reasons we did so well is that they drilled the soldiers so fast that you just had that rip spit Ram fire shoot into the musket, loading the musket mechanical again again, again, so that when you were on the battlefield and you've got cannons going off and people getting shot, you can just zone out and your body doesn't need telling how to, how to load that musket.

Ben Atkinson ([00:33:54](#)):

And it was the same for the trick riding. So you might think trick riding's very dangerous, but it's only dangerous. If something goes wrong and go by, goes wrong. I mean, a horse spooks or a piece of tack breaks. Because by the time you get to the point that you are doing the trick, like under the belly on a straight line at the Gallup, you can't use your brain because you start kneeling on the saddle, looking down the near side or left hand side of the horse. And all you can see is the front legs coming up and the back legs coming in. And it, if you were thinking, you'd never go, yeah, I'm gonna stick my head in there. This is gonna be great, like great day for me. You just have to reach that to breathe, keep breathing deep breaths, calm and gone. There's no thought at that point, you just you've trained the body. Now you, and that's again where I was introduced into one of my favorite sayings of all time, which I think applies to all horsemanship, if not all of life, which is you, you do not rise to the occasion. You sink to the level of your training.

Warwick Schiller ([00:34:59](#)):

I've, I've heard that one a, I mean, I, I use that one a lot and I've heard that was from the of Navy seals, but it may be from somewhere else too. But yeah, love that one. I, I, I saw people that one all the time that you don't, you don't rise the occasion, you sink the level of your preparation or your training. Yeah.

Ben Atkinson ([00:35:17](#)):

And what, another thing I find that's really interesting is how many crossovers you get between all the disciplines. So when I had it hammered into me by GDO him to trick ride, he would say, you know, breathe, always breathe. He'd have me doing exercises off the ground, pushups pullups sprints and get me breathing, concentrating on breathing in those times to be like, if you can't breathe, there's no oxygen without oxygen. You go tense. Your brain stops working later on in my life. When I was in Madrid, having classical dressage lessons, I'd been on holiday there for two weeks learning. And I, I just couldn't like, I felt like I couldn't get enough knowledge into me throughout this time. And so, you know, you, you know, you are leaving. And I turn to my coach out there, this guy called Louis MCGI and I said, what could, if I have one piece of advice, you've got one more thing to tell me, what would it be to help someone be a better dressage rider?

Ben Atkinson ([00:36:11](#)):

And he said, breathe. Everyone forgets to breathe. Cause if you, you could ride better just by forgetting about the writing and just think in and out, in and out. And then again, when I had, when I was lucky enough to have one of the two lessons that I had with Frederick pong, all came back to it again, he took me to the side. He's like, you need to learn, you need to do yoga. You need to do yoga, cuz you need to learn how to breathe. He and I find it interesting that across all, whether you're gonna stand on a horse, ask for P or work with one at Liberty, it all circles back to the breath.

Warwick Schiller ([00:36:53](#)):

What what's what was Fred? What was so you wanna sort like a Frederick clinic, Frederick Pinon clinic. Did you, is that what you did?

Ben Atkinson ([00:37:00](#)):

Yeah. So I did. I've done two clinic. They were both absolutely fantastic.

Warwick Schiller ([00:37:07](#)):

What was the first thing you did?

Ben Atkinson ([00:37:10](#)):

Fred's clinic. So Frederick runs his clinics in a way that they're always over two days. And on the first day he says to you what, you know, he asked you what you do and what you, what you think, which looking back on it now, now that I've done clinics and things, what you think is their customer, you are gonna get from this clinic could not be further from the truth about what you will be learning. And so he asked me what I did and I actually had taken my best horse Malik. And I was saying, I've got this horse and I can do everything with it, but it still runs off or like he's doing it for me. But he's like in the same way that you could see someone pushing a prams, try and get a baby to sleep. But they're talking to someone else.

Ben Atkinson ([00:37:58](#)):

The horse is like, yeah, I'm doing it. Just go off. And so then Frederick said, okay, you go in the round pen, you work the horse. And I'm at this clinic. I'm much younger than I am now. Thank God. But cuz I'd cringe. If I was still the person then who I am now and I take this as, this is my time to shine. So I, cause everyone else has gone in, they've done a bit of line work, a bit of this. I'm like, woo. I enter that round pen. I'm on my horse. Bare back and bridals, galloping it round skid stop. Bow him, stand on his boom. I mean you guys can't see, cause you're not thing I'm going bright red in front of Warwick. Remember it now. You know, everything, I read it, I ed it and I was like, look at all this stuff.

Ben Atkinson ([00:38:40](#)):

My horse can do all probably within about four minutes. Like, you know, no, no feel, no timing, no brain just like, look at my, look at my dancing monkey, which is just horrific. And so then what happens in the clinic next is Frederick works the horse and he, he watches you work the horse. So he is, got your side of the story. Then he works the horse. So he's got the horses side of the story and then he puts it all together. I have never had such a dressing down by anyone, not even my grandmother in my life as a, I got from Frederick. But like he was just like, firstly, well the first thing he did, he did the old we call it, you know, like a, a crap sandwich. Good, bad, good. Yeah. So he was like, firstly, the fact that you have at the age that you have, that must have been about 20 at the time.

Ben Atkinson ([00:39:34](#)):

He was like the fact that you've sought me out and asked for help means that you're gonna get a lot further than other horse trainers who think I'm fine. And then went on to going to great detail about how everything I did and how I got there was wrong and basically too much. I'd become a floating whip, no body language, not of foot position or thought of eye contact or, or direction like that. I just had this little magic wand where I could go poke, poke, poke, poke too erratic, not accounting and no empathy for energy, not reading the room too fast.

Ben Atkinson ([00:40:19](#)):

Being able to brush things off. I would look at something and say the horse would you know, he'd get distracted by another horse over there. And my instinct would be to Y him on the Leero opposed to be like, well, what are we looking at? Should I look as well? And then, you know, so he did me a lot and then fair play to him. I've owe him so much for this. Over that weekend, I was meant to get lessons and he gave me four because he was like, there's so much to fix. And yeah, it was great. It was embarrassing. I cried in front of about 200 people in the arena and I got my dressing down and then said, thank you. And went home and thought, oh, I've I've gone wrong. And then worked probably came one of the, the had a few big moments in life where I've said, well, what are we gonna do here?

Ben Atkinson ([00:41:10](#)):

And there's the ego brain. And the ego brain said, well, we're doing all right. Who says, if we carry on the way we are, it won't work. And then there was the logic brain that says, okay, we're gonna have to start again. And the best, best what's to say the best day to plant the tree was 20 years ago, if not do it today. Yep. And so I actually, I was going from that clinic to a performance and Frederick said to me, if you want this horse to be any good, you don't perform with it for six months. You go home, you only do what you do. And so I did, I changed my entire performances for the next six months. I took my horse out. I went to, and, and now it's, it's paid off and now yeah, I think it's fantastic.

Ben Atkinson ([00:42:00](#)):

And it's one of those things for me, which is, was proof of what I've always done. You know? Cause even by then I was teaching people a bit and you always give someone a lesson, not always some people a fantastic, but often you give someone a lesson, you say, here's the plan. Here's what we're gonna have to do. I, and they say yes. And they leave and you go there. Not gonna do any of that. Oh, they're gonna do it once. And then it's gonna, and just very consciously did everything I could to work in the new method. You know, he took my whips away from me, worked the horses without the whips, just with your body, working in the round pen, working on simple mirroring and all those sorts of things. And in the beginning I found it very hard. And so I would keep it to five, 10 minute sessions, you know, better to go in, do a bit good and then leave opposed to trying to get that, that hours in the bank.

Ben Atkinson ([00:42:54](#)):

Do you know what I mean? Yeah. Junk hours. Yeah. And that's something that stuck with me through all of my training now. So if anyone ever books a lesson with me, the I'll notice that on my website or on my paper work and stuff, it always says, it's this much money for the session. Not per hour, not per, do you know if you bring a horse to me with a problem or that we're trying to fix something or figure something out. If it takes two hours, it takes two hours. If it takes three, three, if it takes 20 minutes, it takes 20 minutes. We're working on what we're working on. And one of the best ways I got myself to fall into that habit, opposed to being distracted by the shiny shiny was at the start of the day on my phone. I write down all the names of the horses I'm going to work and next to it, I write what we're gonna do and what we need to do, what the goal is. Then you can go in, achieve it, brilliant finish, not spoil good work with, with bad things coming up.

Warwick Schiller ([00:43:48](#)):

That must have been a pivotal moment. And I've had 'em before, too. Where, what I found with, with like, with the Frederick moment thing, all of a sudden you're like, oh my goodness, everything, I'm doing's wrong. And then I don't know for me, when I've had those moments, I kind of get stuck, like, okay, I don't wanna do what I was. And I'm not sure how to do what I'm supposed to be doing. And, and I can't, you know, I'm a bit of a freezer anyway, and I'd kind of get stuck in those spots. What was he what's he like to be around? Like, does he have a, a vibe? Does he have an energy year? Does he,

Ben Atkinson ([00:44:20](#)):

The way my mom describes it is she says, I love sitting there Frederick. Cause it just makes you feel like you smoke to join.

Warwick Schiller ([00:44:26](#)):

That's what I was. That's what I was wondering. I mean, that's the way to put it too. But yeah, that's what I was wondering. I'm I figured he must have had that sort of energy.

Ben Atkinson ([00:44:35](#)):

He's just got this. I mean, this is, this was the moment I realized that he was the man. I think a, a big floor of mine is that I will happily be the disciple to someone, but they gotta prove to me that they are worthy of general. You've gotta show me that, you know what you're doing? Well, I'd taken this horse to the clinic and he was going, he was a great horse. He would do stuff, but he would bite. And he was culty and all the time screaming front of the horses. So I've worked the horse and Frederick walks in and I offer him the whip. And he's like, no, no, no, no. He joins up with the horse. It comes into the center, but

it's still screaming and looking everywhere. He puts one hand on its chest in between the front legs, one hand on its Withers.

Ben Atkinson ([00:45:20](#)):

Now the horse is still screaming and looking. And then he seems to push on the horse breathing and then let's go as he breathes out. And it was like, someone just went and sleep. Really this horse he's I mean, this horse he's he's, he's just been gelded. So he was still very like, what's this what's that. And you know, Rick all over and then just boom, wom ears sideways, head down. And I was like, whatever, you've got whatever I need it. I mean, you can tell me, you know, you tell me whatever you I've gotta do. I'm doing it. I'm I'm in.

Warwick Schiller ([00:46:00](#)):

And that right there, ladies and gentlemen is why I asked so many questions about Frederick Penon. Cause, cause I knew there had to be, there had to be something like that there, cuz it's it's it's beyond it's beyond technique. Yeah. Way beyond technique. It's it's it's in the, it's in the person and that's where it be. That's where I think, you know, that's where the horses have taken me, but you know, that's where it becomes a, you get to a certain point to where to get more out of your horses. It's not more stuff you change about what you do with the horses. You change more about who you are, you know, how you show up in the world sort of thing. Remember, years ago, I, I, there was a young guy who he's a, you know, bit of an influencer, whatever. His name is Jake Ducey.

Warwick Schiller ([00:46:53](#)):

I dunno if you ever heard of Jake Ducey, you know, he's only probably in his twenties, but he'd written a book and you know, like some sort of a self-helpy sort of a book, but he, he was putting out these little videos on YouTube and one of them, he, he was talking about, he was talking about manifesting and he said, you don't get what you want. You get who you are. And I had to think about it for a bit. And I like, you don't get what you want. You don't, you get who you are. So when you change who you are, you change the things around you, you know, it's quantum physics sort of stuff. But yeah, I, I really I'm so glad I got that at it. Cuz that's, that's exactly what I thought might be going on with Fred Penon

Ben Atkinson ([00:47:38](#)):

No, definitely. And he actually, as far as I'm aware from what I've heard from other people to the point that he can infuriate some of the people who hire him to do clinic, he pretty much outright point blank refuses to teach any technique. Really. He very rarely teaches any. He won't do much. You know, this is what you should do. This is he's like he'll give exercises, but the exercises will based more around patterns for example, than actually where to touch. And I just found that when I first my, at him, I was like, well, bloody not waste of money. Because I was a stupid child, but now I completely see it. You know, I see it. Cause it doesn't, it doesn't matter how much technique you have. If there's no feeling and feeling makes better technique in the same way, you know, no one could teach you when you are a young boy and you've never kissed a girl, no one could walk you through it. No one could tell you how, and this is how you need to make it good. And then you need to touch. But then when it happens and because you've got the emotion between two people and you feel it suddenly, it's amazing, but you couldn't have written it down. You couldn't have said, this is what I'm gonna do. This is how she'll react or how I'll react. And that's the same with the horses. It can't, it's two living creatures coming into connection. How can you try and write a play by play about what's gonna happen?

Warwick Schiller ([00:49:11](#)):

Yeah. You know, for a while now I've been telling people that the, the, the, the right technique with the, with the wrong energy or the wrong, you know, mental outlook doesn't work. Yeah. You know, so it's more about for a while now, I've been more on people working on their, you know, like their judgments of what's going on and their, you know, all that sort of stuff. But yeah. Great conversation about Fred. Let's get, let's get back to Ben Atkinson. So you've done quite a few movies. Have you ever done, do you only work in the UK? Is it, is it where you only work with movies?

Ben Atkinson ([00:49:53](#)):

Yeah, well, no, we've done. We've done work all around the sort of, well, really mostly Europe bits in Dubai, but I did a big film out in India, a big Bollywood film. And it was the, one of the most different things in the world. If you might Bollywood to work on feels like how a kid's TV show might characterize Hollywood. So when you're working in Hollywood, it's not actually anything like what you want Hollywood to be like. It's very boring. It's people still drown in the rain, drinking coffee under umbrellas, being very quiet. When you work on Bollywood, they've got the megaphone and people shouting and people carrying stereos with mood music on behind actors, as they wander through set, you know, every huge, all the craziness. But going to India was, well, firstly, I would say, I, I think anyone who's into spirituality or anyone who's looking for a, an eye opener in the world, I think India's a fantastic place to go. It's colorful, it's vibrant.

Ben Atkinson ([00:51:04](#)):

And the, the variety in the, of people of situations too much to take in. I, I was out there for months, but I still don't feel like I processed India completely until I'd been home for a while. So the first thing that hit me when I arrived was I had about two weeks of just feeling exceptionally guilty because I'm out there and foolishly, I hadn't even thought about this, obviously all know if someone asked us, do you know, there's poverty in India? You, you know, we know, but I was so young. I was so excited. I think it'll be about 19 or 20 when I went out to do this film in Bollywood. And it hadn't crossed my mind how I was going to cope with seeing the level of poverty. I mean, driving, driving from the airport to the five star hotel, I was gonna be staying in.

Ben Atkinson ([00:51:59](#)):

You feel like such a piece of crap for, you know, I'm out there working in luxury and there are homeless children, 200 meters from my door. It, it very, and some people probably think that I wouldn't know how can you compare what animals feel when there's people, children feeling like that out there. But some of the conditions the animals were kept in the food, the tack, I mean, one of the first things I did when I was out there is I got my father to send me a big box full of egg, but Snapple bits, because a lot of the bits they use are, are solid, straight bar cast iron with spikes. Like, you'd see, like, you know, when you get those really aggressive rollers for your legs and stuff at the gym, mm. Spikes like that across the central bar of the bit, because they have a fascinate, they love it.

Ben Atkinson ([00:52:52](#)):

If the horse is necked with an open mouth, cuz they say it shows that he's very excitable, white eyes, you neck open mouth. Great goodness. So we spent a lot of time. We were working near a lake on this film and I spent a lot of time cutting bits off bridals, throwing them in the lake and then saying, here's a nice N instead, why don't we, why don't we try this? A lot of the time the guys out there, the grooms, they weren't, there was no less than anyone. That is one thing I must ever say. I never saw malice



towards an animal from anyone out there, but I saw neglect through just not knowing fit, how to fit a saddle, putting the pads on, washing them off properly, fitting a bit properly so that it, you know, sometimes you'd see bits where the horse looked like it was smiling.

Ben Atkinson ([00:53:45](#)):

Like the joke, cause it was so high or other times you can hear it banging against the teeth. Simple things. Just how to check. And one, you told the guys once they knew when they were great, but we had a few clashes at first. I mean, I say I never saw anyone do anything with malice. The first time I met my grooms, one of them was they were feeding the hard feed to the horses and this horse kept popping his hell over the and shouting. And so the groom was hitting him on the front of the head with half a wooden broomstick. And so I turned around to my translator and said, tell that, man, if he hits that horse with that broomstick again, I'm gonna hit him. And it was a Rocky start. But when we, when we got them, explained to how we wanted them to go, do you know, the whole horses looked better, the horses went better and, and they were, you know, they were all all in for it. But

Warwick Schiller ([00:54:38](#)):

Yeah, I've, I've, I've wanted to go to to India probably for the, all the reasons you just said, you know? That that'd be the part that I would have a trouble with is is, you know, like seeing the, the poverty and yeah, that's gotta be heartbreaking.

Ben Atkinson ([00:55:02](#)):

I mean, we saw children who I had this, I had my guide who I would ask, cause there was only maybe about three or four of us who spoke English on the entire job. And one night we were driving back to the hotel and you can see children dragging thorn, brushes, branches out with thorn bushes. And I said, what are they doing? He's that to burn? And he said, no, they're laying a pile. So they don't freeze and cover themselves with the thorns. So the wild dogs don't attack them.

Warwick Schiller ([00:55:29](#)):

The children lay in a pile,

Ben Atkinson ([00:55:31](#)):

The children will lie in a pile. So they don't freeze and they'll cover selves in the thorn branches so that the wild dogs don't attack them.

Warwick Schiller ([00:55:42](#)):

Wow.

Ben Atkinson ([00:55:44](#)):

And yeah. And then you are there waning around on a, it was very, I mean you just can't get your head around it around here. Can you, I know that in my country, if someone, you know, if a child of eight or nine years old, didn't get a new Xbox for Christmas, they consider themselves hard done by. Whereas you see that and you just think, well, what on earth

Warwick Schiller ([00:56:08](#)):

Did you find though? You know, cause I've been to a couple of third world countries. Did you find that? I found that the people have the least amount of stuff are the happiest,

Ben Atkinson ([00:56:20](#)):

Oh 10. I was feeling bad and I wanted to know what I could do. And you might notice that I sound more nervous and silly when I'm talking about India than anything else. And it's probably because when I look back on it, as what I consider a grown man, now I'm ashamed that I did less to help other people. I was just so obsessed with what I was doing out there, which is completely different topic. But so one, one of, one of the things I tried to do was to, I thought, well, money, the money exchange rate money that our currency over there is so much, everything's so cheap. So I thought I'm gonna give my grooms a really big tip for the weekend and it'll be great. And I gave the tip to my grooms and they were really happy and they went off and I thought, oh, pat my back.

Ben Atkinson ([00:57:06](#)):

Good, good Ben. And then come Monday morning. My interpreter's like, where are the grooms where I'm like, I don't know. He says, you didn't tip the grooms. Did you? And I'm like, yeah, I might have given them a bit of a bonus. And he said they won't come back. He said, they know that it costs this amount for them to live the life that they like. So they're not gonna come back until that money runs out. He said, they're not like you, you earn more money. Great. I need a bigger car. I need a, I need a bigger house. I need, you know, oh, I can buy designer clothes. So now I will. He said, they just don't think like that. It's not all about more, more, more, they know the life they want to live and if they can afford to live it, they'll go sit on, you know, sit in the sun and enjoy living it. And to me that was so profound, such a simple, such a non-event in life or in the world, or even on that job. But when you look at it in a deeper way, so moving so awakening because are we all, are, are we addicted to the destination or are we enjoying the ride along the way?

Warwick Schiller ([00:58:22](#)):

Yeah. If you're depressed, you're living in the past. If you're anxious, you're living in the future. And if you're peaceful, you're living in the present. Yeah. Yeah. That's it must have been. How long were you there?

Ben Atkinson ([00:58:35](#)):

I think three months, twice I was out there for

Warwick Schiller ([00:58:41](#)):

And what did, what sorts of things were they having to do with horses?

Ben Atkinson ([00:58:45](#)):

Oh, we had, so the first time I was out there, it was the most hilarious thing you've got. I mean, they should have filmed this as its to TV show. There's me a prince from Roger Stan, who is our translator. Now the reason we've got a prince is because we've gotta go to stupid places. So we've got him and this Aussie stunt coordinator because you can't bring horses out of India because of the diseases they have. You can take horses in, but you can't bring 'em out. So when they said to me, we're gonna do all this cool stuff, we've gotta have horses. Is we to do work a Liberty horse to turn like, to spins. Cause it had to

be to have a CG lion on top of it, attacking it, you know, all sorts of crazy stuff. But I was like, I'm not bringing my horses cause I'm not leaving 'em in India.

Ben Atkinson ([00:59:32](#)):

So the first two months was spent traveling around India, buying horses. I have never, nearly got myself killed so many times arriving more towards the beginning because I turned up I'm young. I'm you know, I'm the man. I've not been deck in ages, ride this. Yeah. Whatever I learned very quickly to be like, you ride it first. I mean, they, they brought this one black stallion out and they're like, sir, sir, very good, very good. I'm like, you've got three blokes holding it and it's nearly going over backwards rearing. I ain't getting on. He's like, you'll love him. So I, so I said, okay, you ride him and I'll get on him. Honestly, the moment this guy's backside hit the saddle, this horse just flipped over on him done. So that was, and what would get you is obviously I'm the horseman out there. I'm surrounded by people who don't don't have horse logic.

Ben Atkinson ([01:00:22](#)):

And so the director would be like, but this horse is perfect. We must have this horse. And I'm like, this horse will kill someone. And the only way one of the horses they wanted, that was beautiful. I managed to not get on the film is I had to get my agents back in England to write up this entire contract that basically said when someone is damaged MAED or killed by this horse on set, I am horse master. I, I am not liable. This is not my, like, I, it basically, it was a full document saying this horse should not be on this film. And only when they saw that, did they go, okay? You can choose a different horse. It'll be fine. So that was, that was pretty crazy. And actually it's one of the, mainly I worked with geldings and stallions just by it's cuz I, I always work with stallions.

Ben Atkinson ([01:01:04](#)):

Then it's easier to work with geldings, with stallions than MES with stallions, but out there people are mad for MAs MAs are the best thing in the world. Oh really? Yeah. Huge me culture. And I think part of it is because, you know, if it, if it breaks you like in minds, if for mayor breaks, she can breed from her. Whereas if a stallions don't no's no good. So I had all my mayors out there and they were, they were fantastic. And then we were, it's a balancing act because some of the horses had to work quite hard. And so for that I wanted older horses, you know, like eight or nine years old, strong, good for that kind of work. But for all the Liberty work, I got them to get me three and four year olds that preferably had done nothing.

Ben Atkinson ([01:01:46](#)):

I wanted horses that people like you hadn't, they weren't messed up already. Yeah. I want a three year old. That's lived on the side of a mountain that they're like, but sir, no one can get near him. I'm like a herp. I'm like, yeah, perfect. Wrangle it into a round pen. And then I can do what I need to what I need to do. So that was, that was all pretty crazy. I mean, of so many India stories. So India's got a fantastic thing with visas that I wish other countries kind of had as well. So they, the Indian film actually hired me cuz they saw me on a YouTube video. They saw a YouTube video and the director said, get that man to come to India to do this job. But you can't hire a foreign person if you don't hire a native person.

Ben Atkinson ([01:02:31](#)):

So even if you don't use the native person out there, you still have to pay one so that it's not native people, aren't losing their jobs, the foreigners, which is quite cool. I, I like the concept, but so they had

this Indian horse master there and I was terrified of him. But also I just thought he was one of the, it's just a carer caricature, just a walking caricature. So one of the scenes was this big tiger attack it's at night. And we sat there and they say, we need all the horses to pull back and break their ropes and Gallop off down the road. And I'm like, we've not rehearsed this. I've not been asked to train horses to do this. This was like thrown in out of nowhere. And the Indian horse guy's like good, good is gonna be good. And I'm thinking, oh, well he obviously him and his horses.

Ben Atkinson ([01:03:19](#)):

He cuz I admire MAs that I trained and I kept them away from everyone else. And then they, they had the background horses from him. So he takes these 10 horses and ties them up and he, and there's a water drop in front of them and the water drops empty. So it's a thing on a film set and he sat behind the water with this 12 boy shotgun loading his shotgun and I'm thinking, oh my I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. And sure as hell action. And he just lets off both barrels of this 12 boar as he's hid underneath where the horses are tied. So they can't see bloody horses and every direction pulling back one of their ropes didn't break. I wanna run in and help the, that stuck. The guys are holding me back like or rolling camera, just chaos, just in any other place in the world.

Ben Atkinson ([01:04:11](#)):

If you saw it with horses, you'd be like, what a earth going on round of applause from the film crew, the directors like wow, best shot. Fantastic. Yeah. And that was it. I'm just chaos. Just we had to train, there was a scene where the horses had to Gallop up to the palace. This prince is on a horse going to the palace. And for some reason they wanted some elephants to be coming down the road while the horse came up. And so I knew from reading I quite like more history books with horses than just horses books. So probably my favorite book with horses is Zeon system of horsemanship. Cause I'm like, God, they've not changed in 2000 years. That's brilliant. And in that they talk about how you can scare cavalry with elephants. And if you can't get elephants, get pigs because cavalry will often not go towards them. So you can save your foot soldiers just by having that. So I was like, well I need to get my horses good with elephants. So I asked around and they brought me the oldest polar Ponyia work you've ever seen in the world. It's a skeleton with no teeth because they treat the horses with when they given like cookies, they use pure sugar can. So this horse has got no teeth, but this horse lives with an elephant. So we used that horse to get my horses good with the elephants.

Ben Atkinson ([01:05:28](#)):

I didn't know that these weren't the elephants we were using on the day. So they're like, the horse is good with the elephants boss. I'm like, yeah, yeah. Great. She'll be fine. She doesn't care about elephants. Two elephants coming down this road. They've not closed the road because they're like, oh no, the tourists look great. It's a contemporary piece. It's modern day. So you've got a winding road going up to a castle. It's maybe wide enough for two cars to just get past. There are full of tourists that are two elephants walking down it. And these two elephants see this little white horse cantering up the elephant. I've never seen anything spook so fast in my life. You won't believe the speed an elephant can spook for something. So big elephants turn around. They clear off the little guys running behind him with his little stick, tapping the elephant. And I'm like, but I feel sorry for him. Cause I'm like, Hey, the Liberty horse runs off. It's not coming back. But if an elephant goes off and you, the elephants were terrified of the horse and they stampeded, luckily no one got hurt and nothing but

Warwick Schiller ([01:06:24](#)):

Chaos. So that chaos that falls under the, the, the jurisdiction of the elephant master, not the horse master. Is that right?

Ben Atkinson ([01:06:31](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Well I just was, I was a nervous wreck to be on. I've probably never spoken to my parents more than when I went to year. They were like, when I came back, they said you should go abroad more often. Cuz we speak to you more because every 10 minutes I was probably realistically, probably on the first few weeks, probably every hour on the hour I was on the phone to my father being like dad, I dunno what to do. I'm out of my depth. And he was like, you'll be fine. Just go slowly. Do this, do that. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:07:02](#)):

What a life you've lived. That's amazing. Okay. So what else you got, you've got your, you, what about your Liberty stuff? Where did all, where did all that come from? You know like you you've cuz I've seen footage of you with like a, a, well, how big is your team in Liberty horses now?

Ben Atkinson ([01:07:20](#)):

So it depends the team. If I was just gonna say what the full team technically is, it's 10, but I'm only performing with a nine horse team at the moment. Cuz the 10 horse is just a baby and he's still learning the ropes. So he does demos but not shows. Yep. But, but at the start of the first lockdown I had a, a team of three and the, now, now I've got a team at 10 cause I've had a lot more time at home. So that's been, that's been lovely.

Warwick Schiller ([01:07:50](#)):

So I'm interested in, so I'm, I'm imagine this would all follow the principles of training, but I imagine creating a team of nine or what, however many, you start out, you create a team of one, like you teach them all individually. Yeah. So, and then you start pairing 'em up first things.

Ben Atkinson ([01:08:10](#)):

Yeah. So first you've gotta have a, you've got to make a Liberty horse and I always stand by the first thing a horse got to do is the horse has got to learn. Okay. Not first thing. First thing, we've gotta make sure the horse is trusting us enough, that it can learn. And then they've got to learn how to learn. So I, for example, I'll always try and start with something really simple, like a stride of Spanish walk, I think is always great for a lot of horses because they're getting to learn that, that, hang on, you did a thing. I stomped my foot. You tell me I'm good. I could do more of this. This could work. It doesn't put the horse in a vulnerable position. The horse can stay very, you know, think it's the striking of the front leg. It's not like asking the horse to move over or bow because I think sometimes you can, you can yourself in troubles with, I see a lot of styles of horsemanship where there's a, a lot on the drive in the beginning, drive this drive that send them around and then they're like, oh, but the horse can't, he doesn't stand still when he is near me.

Ben Atkinson ([01:09:10](#)):

And you're like, well, I wonder why which is driven and driven. For me, if, if you were gonna boil it down at the base of all my Liberty training, I have what I call the three CS. So clarity, consistency equals confidence. So just to simplify it, it's clarity be clearing your goal and how you ask for it. Consistency

consistently ask for the same movement or behavior in the same way. And then confidence, if you clear ask for the same thing in the same way every time. And the horse becomes very confident that that that's the correct answer and

Warwick Schiller ([01:09:47](#)):

Yeah. Don't you think they become confident in you two, you know like yeah. You know, like being, being consistent about things, you are communicating your probably your co you know, communicating your

Ben Atkinson ([01:10:06](#)):

Reliability. Yeah. Yeah. So from the, from the three CS, that's where I'm very sort of similar to you. I have my idea of, so for my idea of tools in the toolbox, because for me, horses are only gonna run off at Liberty if they feel are over pressured. And if they feel over pressured generally it's because they don't understand. You know, if you ask someone, if you imagine it as a conversation between two people, if you ask something to someone in a reasonable manner and it's a reasonable request, most reasonable people aren't gonna freak out or disagree or they are, you can have a conversation about it. If you go in and you mumble what you say, then they can't hear you and they might get it wrong. If you are going and you are too aggressive that person's just gonna turn around and walk away from you, cuz they don't want anything to do with what you've got to offer.

Ben Atkinson ([01:11:00](#)):

And that's all very similar with horses. So to get the Liberty, to work for me, you have to get that initial connection. And then from there you're working on your tools in the toolbox. So for me, that's behind quarters away and towards from both sides and in front shoulders around the hi quarter away and towards from both sides, the horse moving fully sideways away and tos from each side and in front and the horse rain back and forwards from both sides and in front and eventually from behind with the rain back as well. Now, the reason I have those basic skills that I like to put in is because there's not a lot that you can't communicate. Of course, from there you build more subtle cues, more subtle conversation. So I, I try and always say to people when I'm teaching you imagine the tools in the toolbox that I've just said them, each one of them is a word.

Ben Atkinson ([01:12:05](#)):

And it's a word in the language that you and your horse are building together. The more words you have in the language, the more complete the conversation you could have together because now when there's a moment of con infusion or you know, a, a loss of connection between the two of you, if you have a way to interact, to act that has clearly clearly gives a signal, has always been the same for every SI. Every time you've done that movement or gesture or footstep or you know, noise, but you you've always wanted that same movement or behavior. The horse gets very good and very confident at giving it to you. And, and because then you have this flowing communication and the horse is gonna choose to stay with you and trust you. Whether the things and that's in a nutshell, my, my Liberty, you know, in a few words.

Warwick Schiller ([01:13:00](#)):

And so you get that with each of those horses. And then do you start, I imagine you simple maths, you start two at a time and then three, do you do you depends. Depends.

Ben Atkinson ([01:13:14](#)):

Depends. So if I'm starting a, your horse and I've already got a trained older horse, then I'll start them as a pair. And during that training with the pair now using the, the, the communication tools that we've built, I start to teach them to be team players. So teaching them that, for example, say, I've got, you know, the horse, a and B horse a on the left horse B is on the right. When we take a left hand, turn horse a must slow down and step his shoulders away into the circle. Horse B must speed up and step slightly outwards in a bit of a shoulder in around the edge of the circle to move around the other horse. When we come level, we want our noses to stay level again, when we're on a straight line, again, sounds like put it like that.

Ben Atkinson ([01:14:13](#)):

It's, it's impeccably simple, but teaching horses to start to think as a herd and work with each other and wait for each other to stay level. So we do a lot of work on the ground. Well, the first thing we would do is, is what we call it, send away and recall, but you could call it join up is in the round pen, send the horse out when you whistle it, it comes in and that's where we are gonna start by building our positions in the team. Now, if you've got an existing team, then you kind of cuz you've already done that individual work. You know, the personalities of each horse, you know, which horse is gonna fit well, where, what we start with say, if we've got our, like we've said, horse a and horse B, we've our older horse and our younger horse, I've gonna have, I'm gonna know where I want the older horse to be in the team.

Ben Atkinson ([01:14:59](#)):

So I'm gonna teach the younger horse to go to whichever side I want it to go to with this particular horse, the sides and the order that the horse is going in, the team stays consistent throughout all their training for me. So when we travel on the lo to a show, they travel in the order. Oh really? When they're in the state, when they're in the stables, they're in order really. And then what's hilarious is that if they're in the field and they get spooked, they go in order in order, like, this is where we go. This is, this is what we do. So yeah. And then we start by having our own old horse parked in the middle. If he's a good Liberty horse, you can park him in the middle of the round pen. If he's a younger horse or he doesn't know the job, just have a mate sit on top or stand and hold him.

Ben Atkinson ([01:15:44](#)):

And we send each one round and call it in and do it in, take him in turns, doing that and then eventually send both round and call him in. And that was the same as if you're doing 2, 3, 4, 10, whatever, because at some point they're gonna run off. Something's gonna happen. One of them's gonna kick another one out of chance. A kid's gonna, I've had it before where a kid threw a balloon into the middle of my Liberty horses from the crowd line. As we went along, we can prepare for most things, but not, you know, it just happens. Sometimes the horses go, oh, you've gotta no, when those horses go off, you can stay. There is the, so what I call it, the emotional anchor, we have to be the emotional anchor. So the horse can get spooked and go, oh you know this, hi, I'm crackers.

Ben Atkinson ([01:16:30](#)):

I'm gonna attack it. And we say no, where the anchor, I'm not coming up with you. I'm here. This is where you wanna be come back down. Or if they get scarred or nervous, we can't start to panic as well. You see it on people on trail rights and flat, oh, doing this, doing that. Yeah, no, you have to, we, we are the emotional anchor, no matter what happens, we stay level. We breathe and we, and you'll find, I'm

sure you've had this at clinics and stuff as well. You'll be trying, trying to work with someone with a horse and their horse is leaving them and coming to you because the person who's having the lesson is freaking out and you as the trainer, that they're very relaxed. And so the horse is like, I'm looking at, I'm reading the room, I'm on your team. You know where you're

Warwick Schiller ([01:17:13](#)):

Off. You know, it's funny, it happens a lot at clinics and horse experts. Someone's got a, you know, on the ground, they're holding onto horse and it's like flying a kite sort of a thing and has no interest in that particular human. And I'll say, okay, well let in the re lead rope and I'll see what I can do. And I will walk up. And that horse goes from like flying a coat to yeah. Straight over. And it ha yeah, it happens. Well, it's been happening for quite a few years now, but it didn't used to. And that's the, that's the thing that really made me aware of this stuff is, is seeing the, the change in the horse. You know, I used to have to take a hold of the lead rope and do something to get the change. And a lot of times those horses will.

Warwick Schiller ([01:17:57](#)):

And, and so I, you know, it's that, I, I love it. One happens because I'll say, you know, that didn't used to happen. And so that's not, I'll tell people, I didn't just do something right then energetically or whatever. I didn't do anything to try, try to make that horse different. I just came over here. And so that, that's a good segue into, you know, like clinics. Once people see that it's a good segue into you are the problem. Yeah. You know what I mean? Not like not pointing the finger, like you're the problem, but you know, our energy and our judgements and all that stuff, how we show up is a huge part of this. And it's always good. If, if people see that at the start, at least get some and at least get some thinking about that, you know, I mean, you can't, you can't fix that stuff all of a sudden, but you can make people aware that, oh my, how I show up and you know, like you said, 'em indigo, you gotta be the emotional anchor and that.

Warwick Schiller ([01:18:54](#)):

Yeah. And I think, I mean, these days I'm really big on horses. Just being a conduit for people being better versions of themselves, it just happens to be horses is the thing that leads us there. But I think the great thing about horses, people are very passionate about 'em and will do whatever it takes to get along with their horses. And so, you know, you kinda, the horses are helping the people learn how to be that emotional anchor. And then you can be an emotional anchor for your husband and your wife and your kids and your, you know, and it, and it, it kind of branches out through humanity basically.

Ben Atkinson ([01:19:34](#)):

Yeah. I think it's such, such a strange journey to get people, to see and involve themselves in. Cause I think people that aren't people that are adamant that that's not something that's part of horsemanship are blue in the face to it. But when you, you say it's the same as your relationship with your wife or your friends or any, anyone like that. I think if people could really view it like that to an extreme pedantic extent with their relationship them and their them and their horse. So for example, if you've got friend and every time you go out with him, it's just the best time. Nothing bad ever happens. Whenever you get a phone call from them and they say, you know, you're coming out Friday night, you're going, you it's gonna be good fun. Everyone's gonna have a good time. Whereas if you've got that friend that says, you know, you'll go for two beers and then they're squaring up to someone at the bar and then you loo and it's stressful and it goes wrong.



Ben Atkinson ([01:20:29](#)):

Or someone that turns up and they say, let's go out on Friday, but then they're not there. And then they've not made a plan. You are not wanting to hang out with those people. And that's you to your horse. Are you the person that turns up and makes sure like, we've got a plan, we'll go in here, here and here. We're doing this, this and this. When stuff goes wrong, you are like back. It's all fine. If you are that person, you wanna hang out with them. If you are that trainer, the horse wants to be with you. If you are panicked and stressed and you're bringing that energy to it. I always think if, if you imagine yourself as the tour guide and the horse is the tourist following you, how would you as the tourist feel with that tour guide, you wanna be having a good time. You don't want a tour guide. That's scared. Cuz then you are gonna be scared. You don't wanna cure guide. That's losing their temper or doesn't know what they're talking about. Cause you are gonna say like, come on, let's leave. I'm not, I'm not for that. And that's, that's what we are where a guide.

Warwick Schiller ([01:21:28](#)):

You are quite the guide. And I've just realized that we could talk for like six hours. I, I took you forever. So we bet I better change tack here and get to some of these questions that, that you've chosen for me to ask. And some of these you may have, especially this first one, I think you may have already covered it, but let's let's, let's go with 'em anyway. So the first question you said, like was what has been your biggest and how has it helped you?

Ben Atkinson ([01:21:57](#)):

Partly definitely say the Frederick clinic, getting that dressing down in front of people. And the, mainly for me, the failures I've had while performing. So definitely not enjoyable at the time. I mean, one of them was I working for, we got asked to audition for a, a big show for horse of the year show in this country. And the lady who was the director said, yeah, I love the team. I want you all apart from the kid, apart from the boy, he's not good enough. He's not coming. And when told me this, I think I'd been about 15 at the time. And I was broken and he said, look, cause we're like family at this point. He said, if you don't, he says, if you are really upset, we'll turn it down. I said, no, don't be stupid. I said, you go and one day I'm gonna go back to that show on my own steam because that's, and that's what I'm gonna do.

Ben Atkinson ([01:22:57](#)):

And I can remember he, even that event and sitting and crying in the shower and being heartbroken, but I pick myself up, I put myself to the task and now I've performed at hos twice under my own steam, under my own name. And it was one of the best things that happened to me because it taught me that life. Isn't a fairy tale just cuz you get the audition doesn't mean you're gonna get the part. And it gave me a much deeper respect from that moment from being so young when it happened as well. So that when I came across people like Frederick and other people I've come across in my life. Critics, I've not brushed it off and said, well they know nothing or I've not tried to shirk it away. You lean into the, into the storm, lean into the storm. It'll it'll help you grow.

Warwick Schiller ([01:23:47](#)):

Yeah. There's something about there's so about, you know, critics have almost gotta figure out who to listen to and who not to like, like talking to someone like say Frederick, well, you listen to that. But I mean like in the public space, you've gotta be careful who you listen to and who you don't but not everybo. I've found that not everybody in the public space is a troll. Some people actually have some

good information. And so yeah. You know I was getting off track there. Didn't you, that was horse of the year show you were talking about. Yeah. Didn't you actually get engaged at that?

Ben Atkinson ([01:24:20](#)):

No, we got engaged at the great Yorkshire show. Oh, okay. That was the most scariest show of my life because well, my Liberty horses had my back. Imagine, trying to, I know I'm going to propose, obviously she doesn't. How many,

Warwick Schiller ([01:24:34](#)):

How many people are at this thing?

Ben Atkinson ([01:24:37](#)):

Oh my goodness. 20,000, 30,000. There's probably 150,000 at the show, but just, it depends. Who's watching yeah. Around the arena at the time and yeah, I was terrified. I'm going on thinking don't drop the ring. My Liberty team are on autopilot. I can tell, I could looking back at some pictures and videos from the day I proposed. I can tell the horses who are looking at me, like come on, man. At least be in the right place. So you can pretend you've done the right thing. Why are you doing? And I'd come up with this entire convoluted plan where I made my fiance. I made her stand. I was like, right. I've changed what I'm doing with the Liberty horses, but I need a second schooling whip at this point. So I need you to stand here in the arena. And then when I need the whip, I'm gonna Becken you over.

Ben Atkinson ([01:25:25](#)):

So she's like, yeah, yeah, cool. Whatever. I'd already had to come up with an entire lie to get her to the show because she's a farrier and she doesn't actually do the performances. And I was like, oh, I can't get a ride. I need someone to ride in the, in the dressage section. Cause he's a dressage rider as well. And she was like, look, I'm sure you can. So she's going on Facebook? And I've got my friends messaging me saying, mate, George has asked me to ride at the Yorkshire, but you told me that she's and I'm like, and she is telling you busy. Like she, so we managed to get her to the show and then she stood there. I, I do. And I promised myself, I do the entire act first and then I could relax and then propose. So I've lined the team up, which she knows is the end of the show.

Ben Atkinson ([01:26:06](#)):

So I'm still there going George, George, the whip George. And she stood in front of me going the show's over. You don't need the whip. Why? And I go bring me the whip. Why? And then you thinking, oh my goodness. And then eventually she came and it went well. And I had the, the guys who worked for me came and grabbed all of the Liberty horses bar two, and then to celebrate like as our triumphant, we just got engaged. We jumped on two horses, bridal us and raced each other, bridal us around this arena to the, for a lap of honor, which was pretty, just a good way to start there. The that's that's engagement or a marriage. That's

Warwick Schiller ([01:26:46](#)):

Pretty cool. You know, at clinics, I often, you know, I talk to people about, with their horses about only asking yes questions. Okay. You know, or they need to know the answer before you ask the question. And I say, the example I use is it's like, you know, men, when they ask woman to marry them, they're pretty sure that they're gonna say yes, yes, no one gets down on one knee buys, a ring gets down on one

knee. If they, they're not sure they're gonna get a yes. I tell you what, it's another level to buy a ring, get down on one knee in front of 20,000 people. You really gotta know. They're gonna say yes,

Ben Atkinson ([01:27:25](#)):

Of course a all your family and friends and everyone knows. So they're all coming. But she, she didn't know I was gonna propose then or there, she didn't know I was gonna propose, but we'd had a conversation months before where someone had got married and I said, oh, how would you like me to? I was like, if we were gonna get married, how should I propose? And George is actually quite a private person. So it really shocked me. She was like, I want the biggest proposal you can do. I want big, I want public. I want me and you everywhere. I was like, right, well, I guess I can do it. And I said to her, then I was like, the deal is, I will give you the biggest proposal I can come up with. But you have to say, yes, I was like, you can't know as a joke and then laugh and say, yes. I was like, if I'm gonna do this, you've gotta say, you've gotta play along. That's the, that's the game.

Warwick Schiller ([01:28:16](#)):

Oh, that sounds like a, that sounds like a great proposal. Okay. Next question here is if you could spread a message around the world, what would that be?

Ben Atkinson ([01:28:27](#)):

Okay. So this one is an odd one. Let's sort of two sides to this. I think people need to be a lot more self-critical in the right ways. So I don't mean self-critical as in, you know, it's not like whipping yourself with thorn branches, cuz you're a bad person that don't tear yourself to pieces. Don't be, self-destructive, there's a big difference between self critical and self destructive, but be able to take a very realistic look at what's going on in life and see why it's happening. And are you ready to pay the price for that? So for me, a great example for this is with food and eating. You know, if you are, if you're gaining weight, you know, you're eating too much food or you know what you are eating is wrong or you know, you can, you can look at that and figure it out pretty quick, but it takes a level of self honesty to get to there.

Ben Atkinson ([01:29:23](#)):

And that for me, transfers with all of life and definitely into horse training to know be self-critical nitpick at the things that when it comes to horses, especially with my passion for Liberty, it doesn't matter if you know where to touch the horse with the whip. But if you are handling with a whip is crap and you touch in the wrong spot. Doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you are feeling, you know, if you arrive at the yard and you'd be looking forward to working that horse at Liberty all day, but you've just had a fight with your partner in the phone, in the car, just before you arrived, change plans, you know, make decisions using all the information that's available. Don't stick your head in the sand because you've got a path that you think you're gonna be on. And I think there's so many just by looking inwards on ourselves, really looking at the cost of things in our lives.

Ben Atkinson ([01:30:21](#)):

I don't mean I don't mean financial cost. I mean, for example of like for me, I, I like to go to the gym on a morning, so I have to get up early to do it. If I'm still gonna fit working, I have less sleep, but I get to do what I enjoy. It's the payoff. And then it makes me a better person during the day, just looking at ourselves in that way and, and deciding where we, where we're willing to sacrifice to, to experience growth in another area. And just being very honest about that.

Warwick Schiller ([01:30:52](#)):

That was awesome. Next question. What is the most worthwhile thing? You've put your time into

Ben Atkinson ([01:31:03](#)):

Malik? My dapple gray, the one who I went for the Frederick lessons with the hardest horse to train on planet earth. I stand by my guns with that one. Any other horse trainer can come and meet him. He has taught me more in all the world than absolutely anything else. I cuz it, he was a horse. I was, I was gifted him for my 18th. Birthday is a two week old cult. And so obviously in my mind, it's gonna be a Disney film. We're gonna take on the world. I mean, we we're doing all right, but he was just the trickiest. He's the most intelligent horse I've ever met in my life. And he made my life, which at the time I would've considered it a living hell. Cause he was so difficult to do absolutely everything, but has made me the horseman that I am today in every single way, taught me so many things.

Ben Atkinson ([01:31:49](#)):

You couldn't get it slightly wrong. You had to be there, you be present. You had to be aware. And I guess that would lead me into the overall Liberty, just pursuing Liberty to come up with a way that was simple. And that worked, that didn't need to be bells and whistles. You don't need to do 12 years as an apprentice or buy seven books or do you know, it's simple, it's simple Liberty that every horse and every person can enjoy. So that horse Malik helping me come up with my style and my method of work in liberties, the thing that's been most worthwhile in, in my life,

Warwick Schiller ([01:32:28](#)):

That is a great answer on a horsey kind of a podcast. Okay. Next question is, and before I ask this question, it has the word profession in it. And sometimes it's hard or with some of the guests on the podcast, because a lot of times I don't have a profession that is a profession. It's not like a doctor or a lawyer or whatever, you know, but the question is, what's the worst advice you see given in your profession?

Ben Atkinson ([01:32:56](#)):

I guess. So I chose this question, but I've got a bit of a weird sideways edge into the answer, weird away. Cause this is, this is something that I have really, really passionately feel about. And I think you see it more in the horse world than anything else. Why do we have a, they are wrong. Don't do that culture opposed to I do it this way. And it really works. Why don't you try? I find so many trainers, so many even just riders. Everybody wants to say, so the amount of trainers I follow on social media, who I can't actually remember them ever posting anything that's POS they never post a, why don't you try this? This is a method. I really, I always do this. When I'm about to do X, Y, Z exercise, all they post is riding a double bridal is abuse. You shouldn't ride in this, don't do that. Duh, never do this. You, you wouldn't try and teach a child or a horse, something by just telling them off every time they did the wrong thing, you encourage and nurture towards the correct outcome. And I think it's such a toxic, weird witch hunting way that we've seen it in the horse world, a poster celebrating those who are good and sharing what works with each other. We're just all about pulling down people around us. And I, it drives me absolutely mental.

Warwick Schiller ([01:34:31](#)):

Yeah. I'm not much of a fan of, of that. Especially, you know, the thing is if a lot of times people, or sometimes people are doing that because they, they actually want to help. And there is an actual better way of doing it, but telling someone else they're doing it wrong is never a way to encourage them to do it differently. It just alienates them from your opinion in the first place. I think I, I was in a, like a Western store or something over here a few years ago and there was a sign on the wall and it said the best sermons are lived not preached. And so, you know, I think, I think people who lead by example who, who, you know, show a better way just by showing a better way without saying you are doing it wrong, but say, this is like, just like what you are saying.

Warwick Schiller ([01:35:23](#)):

Like, this is how I do it. And there's you never, I think you should never forget the, or never underestimate the power of planting a seed. You know what I mean? Like exposing somebody to is something that's maybe a bit different than what they do, but not shoving it down their throat, but just planting the seed and yeah, I, yeah, I'm, I'm totally all over you with that. And I think that that's drives me nuts too, when people do that, okay, here we go. What do you do to relieve stress? And I think you may have exercise

Ben Atkinson ([01:36:00](#)):

I'm, you know, that more old fashioned style of like system of horsemanship. That's like, you know, to calm the mind, move the feet that like, obviously none of us really go after that anymore with horses. But with myself, that is, that is me. That is me down to a, if I was a horse, I would weave, I would box walk. I'd crib, all of it. If I'm very stressed then, well, I've already not. I've already said I, I have to be lunged on a morning. I have to go to the gym every morning. Just partly to a bit of me time, but just do just lift heavy things, physical exertion, get the endorphins, going, feel good, attack the day. But if I'm ever in a very dark place or I'm struggling with, you know, I have to come up with a, I have a problem with a horse or a, a personal problem with life.

Ben Atkinson ([01:36:51](#)):

I just stick my running shoes on and I just go and it could be a 5k. It could be a half marathon, could be a marathon. It could be longer. I just run until the problem seems to figure itself out. And it's almost like when I'm, because the running gives me something to do with the body. It's almost like I can have like, like a background tonight when you're doing one thing on the computer, but you've got a old it's something loading or downloading in the background. It's almost like by giving the body, you the fight off flight mechanism, a thing to do, it allows the adults in the brain to talk while the animals are just getting rid of that. Getting rid of that electric energy.

Warwick Schiller ([01:37:38](#)):

Yeah. You, when we chatted the other day with, with the one that didn't work, you, you told me a running quote that I can't remember what it was, but it was like,

Ben Atkinson ([01:37:46](#)):

If you, if you wanna speak to yourself for a mile, if you need to speak to God, run a that's what

Warwick Schiller ([01:37:51](#)):

It was. Yeah. So it's that, it's that? Do you think that is like the pushing through the barriers and you know definitely. Yeah.

Ben Atkinson ([01:38:02](#)):

And it, and, and it can be to do with the chemical version of pushing through the barriers. So I know for myself personally, if I'm going on a long run, like say 20, 30 K or longer, I'll normally feel a bit like, oh, I'm not sure I can do this until I get to about eight kilometers, I get seven, eight kilometers. And then it's like the switch clicks. And I'm like, I could do this all day. I can just go and go. This isn't gonna bother me, but equally, I think it's good for, so there are times when I've struggled with general bits of anxiety, bits of depression, and sometimes just by setting myself a goal, I'm gonna leave that door and I'm gonna run 20 K or I'm gonna run a marathon, lock down one, got my head in a real estate. I'm gonna run a marathon.

Ben Atkinson ([01:38:51](#)):

I didn't know what to do. All the shows had canceled. It was bad. And the success of achieve that goal that day I ran, I got up and I ran my marathon. And by the end of it, I'd also used that time to figure out I'm not gonna sit and complain. I'm gonna train these horses. I'm gonna come out of this better than I've ever been. And partly, yeah, partly through the time to think. But partly through that, I feel a feeling like a failure, but then you actually set yourself a goal and, and knock it out the park. And there's, there's such a good feeling to just get you back on track. Nothing like a win.

Warwick Schiller ([01:39:32](#)):

Yeah. It sounds like you try you like to challenge yourself. You told me the other day that when you go to the gym, you, you go to CrossFit.

Ben Atkinson ([01:39:39](#)):

Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:39:40](#)):

Yeah. Rob and I have been to CrossFit a little a bit. I think, you know, I was kind of scared CrossFit initially, because I've heard, it's just crazy killer injuries, you know? Well, not so much injuries, but just, you know yeah. They make your work till your puke and that sort of thing. But when I went, I found it's just like horse training that they, you can scale it down to a find a good starting point. You build from there, there is like there's ladies in there probably in their late sixties. And yeah. You know, they might be just lifting a bar with no weights on it or, you know, whatever, but they, you can take the exercise and you can break it down into a, a, a, a good starting point. And you build on that, build on that. Some I wanted to comment on here.

Warwick Schiller ([01:40:28](#)):

So for that horseman showcase thing that we were on, it's a, is it, it's a UK based thing, isn't it? Yeah. Yes. UK. Yeah. So, you know, like the poster they do for it. So all us clinicians or whatever you wanna call us that are, you know, contributing to the thing, there's all these, like, there's a picture of me over here, you with a horse. And then there's a picture of maybe tick, main art over there and someone else, and right in the middle is this shirtless Ben Atkinson with his freaking six pack Liberty Roman riding on these horses or something others like good on your band, making us all look bad.

Ben Atkinson ([01:41:02](#)):

Yeah. There, there, there have been a few that I have to say. That's probably one of the things that I, I enjoy that. So I enjoy that. I've done a lot of the topless photo shoots and stuff, so that when I'm older, I can look back and be like, your dad used to look like this, even though I don't look like it now or whatever, but actually it was a big thing for me because I had two years ago, I had colic surgery like myself. So I got all my guts twisted up and tried to kill me. And it was pretty crap. Yeah. Yeah. I had to have all my intestines. I had to have emergency surgery and get cut open from the bottom of my ribs, to the top of my belt line and basically take it all out, UN jumble the puzzle, and then put it back in. They have no idea why it happens. It's just a rare phenomenon. And so one of the reasons I, I quite happy with the topless pictures and stuff now is because now I've got myself a good old scar down there, down the middle. So it's quite, you're like, ah, yeah, they're still knocking out. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:00](#)):

Well, if I looked like you shirtless you, wouldn't never find a picture of me with a shirt on. So,

Ben Atkinson ([01:42:06](#)):

Well, I, but then I do get, I do, like, my mom gets crossed and I have to I'm a little bit the same. Sometimes I'm like, come on, there are better. I, there are pictures, me doing cooler stuff with horses, with clothes on. Don't always use a topless.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:19](#)):

Well, the thing, the thing about looking at that, and it's kinda like what I alluded to earlier on, like, you've got the, there's the Liberty stuff, then there's the trick riding stuff and there's the stunt stuff. And then there's the dressage stuff. And then there's the, you know, the, the, the, the stuff on the around, and it's like, you could take a lifetime to, to do all those things and that picture of you on that Horseman's showcase thing. I think we did you have, were you Roman riding and had a team of

Ben Atkinson ([01:42:49](#)):

Horseman? I just walking. I might have been, I might, I think I'm just walking in front of the six. Yeah. So you

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:54](#)):

Got, so that picture right there. So, you know, Ben's ripped and he's shirtless in this picture, but that picture tells me a lot. He has put in the time to train six Liberty horses. And at the same time, obviously exercised enough, worked enough. And I'm sure there's a lot of diet in that, cuz I don't think you can get a six pack just by working out. On's it's a lot of, you know, so it's just that picture just, there's a lot of discipline. There's a lot of hard work in that picture. You know what I mean? That's when, when I looked at that, I was like, well, there's a lot to

Ben Atkinson ([01:43:31](#)):

That. Yeah. I would say for me, I I've all like, I obviously I'd never judge anyone on that fitness or something, but I think it's a very good, because I work out and I go to the gym and stuff, guys, more than girls, but they'll sometimes try and start a conversation. If you've met someone, they'll tell you about what they work out with. And you know, you talk about the gym and stuff and because I've done it for so long, generally you can tell if someone's weaving you a tail, cuz if someone's like, yeah, I work out

these ties a week and this is all I eat and I do that. And you they're like, well, you'd look different if you did. So why lie? Why? Like you can't it's one, the only things in, and that's one of the things that keeps me addicted to, I, I I'm a big flow state person. Like I said already, I love the flow state from CrossFit. I love the flow state from running from Liberty Roman, riding anything. The way you'll have to be like in is, is, is amazing. But I, I like that you can't cheat it. You can't the same way. You can't buy a Liberty horse and have it stay really good or a raining horse or a jumper or anything. You can't buy a six pack. You, you can put the work in. That's it.

Warwick Schiller ([01:44:43](#)):

Have you ever read the book? The rise of Superman? No. No. It's all about the flow. It's all about the flow state. Yeah, that, yeah, that's the, that's the thing with, with, like I said, with that picture, just, just, you know how you said you talk to people and they tell you how they work out and how they eat and you kinda look at 'em like, well, if you did you look different? I, I find that with the horses, people can tell you all sorts of stories about what they can do with their horse, but the horse tells you the truth.

Ben Atkinson ([01:45:16](#)):

Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:45:18](#)):

And not, I'm not, not judging people, but you know, just, you know yeah. Just tell the truth. Yeah. The, the horse will tell me exactly what's going on. Okay. Last question. And I'm, I love the fact that you chose this question, cuz you've already talked about this a bit, but, and you, I think there's only been one podcast guest who has, is not chosen this question and that's that's cool.

Ben Atkinson ([01:45:40](#)):

Cause and you made him answer it anyway. I made

Warwick Schiller ([01:45:42](#)):

Him answer it anyway. Yeah. And he was fine with it, but yeah, this is cool. Cuz not everybody would wanna discuss this, but what's your relationship like with fear based, based on the fact that you can, you will on a galloping horse crawl under his belly and around and up the other side, I I'd like to, I'd like to know what the answer to this question is.

Ben Atkinson ([01:46:01](#)):

So why are you afraid? What makes you afraid? What could go wrong? So some fear is simply internal. So for example, could like being scared of walking up to ask a girl out in a bar, what's the worst that's gonna happen. She's gonna throw a drink over you, maybe slap your in the face. What's the best that happens. You go home with her worth risk reward. It's easy. It's just a push through it. It'll be fine fear with the stuff that we do with the horses. It's a different type of fear. It's a, I could get hurt. The horse could get hurt. And so for me, fear dies within two things. Fear dies within prepar and boredom. So first, so for example, a great example. The thing that terrified me the most about under the belly was getting smashed up and kicked about you gotta get your head through as quickly as possible because if you get hit in the back of the head, you get knocked out, you get dragged.

Ben Atkinson ([01:47:01](#)):



And so what I'm doing with anything like that, that scares me. I'm just drilling the technique in a physical thing, drill a technique again and again, until it's built in clockwork. A different example of that of drilling technique is when I first started standing on there doing the Roman writing without the bridals, like it's terrifying. So I would re I would build up the courage to do each session when I was learning it by first, I'd go. Okay, cool. Can I stand on these two horses in bridals? They went well, brilliant. Take it off the list. How are these horses working? Rid bridal less? Well, I start my bridals work from the floor anyway. So I do the Liberty work. Pre-Flight checks, tick it all off. Then we jump on bride, them bridals, tick it all off. Then when get up there, we know we've got this fear inside us, but we can start to slowly.

Ben Atkinson ([01:47:58](#)):

Okay. I know that this works. I know that this cue works. I know I can steer them. I can stop them. It's all on me. I know I can do it with the bridals. It's no different, it's the same thing just without the bridals. And so I try and kill as much fear as possible through preparation, be as ready as possible. A bit like have you seen the film rush where they're the F1 drivers and they, and they go through, so when I'm getting ready to perform, I will sit and I go through the show perfectly and my mind. And then I go through the show and I'm like, and when this like, you know, we all know our horses, don't we, we know where it could go wrong, where it could. And so I play that in my mind. Okay. When I ask him to do that, he runs off, what do you do?

Ben Atkinson ([01:48:43](#)):

How do you cope with it? How do we fix it? Don't lose the showmanship, do this. Again, all that preparation all the time. And then when preparation comes to its end, my next thing is boredom. If you do something so often that it becomes boring, it can't scare you anymore. So one of the main things I did during that beginning of the lockdown, it was the middle of summer here. I was terrified. I'd done one year of performing Roy riding without bridals. And I hated how I looked and I did it cause I was scared. And so through that entire first lockdown, I would stand on the floor without their bridals. I would set a timer on my phone that would go off in 30 minutes. And I had Toro around that field, standing on those horses for 30 minutes. If I wanted to give the horses a walk and I wanted to get down, I had to get the phone out and I had to pause the timer.

Ben Atkinson ([01:49:35](#)):

I had to do 30 minutes standing on those horses intra until I was bored of it. And when I found myself getting bored, suddenly looking over in another field, what's going on there, humming a little tune while you're doing it. And then you go, I'm not scared. I'm not scared anymore. And that's how in my life with my horses and my career sort of so far how I attack fear, prepare as much as you can. And then whenever possible do that thing repeatedly until it's boring. Cuz you can't be scared of something that you board of

Warwick Schiller ([01:50:10](#)):

Out of the, I don't know how many guests we've had, but we've had 60 something podcasts. But I, I, I like that answer to that question probably better than any of the others. So Ben, we probably should wrap this thing up. We've been going for a while. So how do people find out more about all things Ben Atkinson,

Ben Atkinson ([01:50:29](#)):

This transcript was exported on Feb 11, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

The best place to catch me is on Instagram. Be on Ben underscore action horses and we are on Facebook, but we've had some major Facebook problems. So I think we'll be starting Facebook again with the new page. So please keep an eye out for that and yeah, come and see how we train. We try, we post all our like training footage, us what we're doing in films on shows. So yeah, come by say hi.

Warwick Schiller ([01:50:55](#)):

Oh cool. That's awesome. Well Ben, thanks so much for joining us on the podcast. I can tell from this conversation that there's so much, there's so much more to Ben Atkinson than we got outta here today. But I think that's a little taste of it. You know, you seem like an old soul, like you're 28, but that you're, you've got a mindset that maybe I'm just slow. Like it took me to was about 48 before I started even look at the world the way you do. So yeah, I think, I think you're a bit of a bit of a game changer as far as being in like in, for influencing people, you know, you do something that people are attracted to or interested in. They wanna see it, they wanna learn about and might necessarily learn how to do it, cuz it's pretty hard, but people can definitely get excited about what you do. And I think, you know, you talking about like the mindset and thing that, that, that it takes to do things like that. I think that's, I think that's gonna just help people maybe look at their own the way they deal with things in their own life and in doing so make the world a better place. So thanks so much for joining us on the podcast and thank you so much for doing what you do. Thank

Ben Atkinson ([01:52:09](#)):

You so much for having me I've loved every second.

Warwick Schiller ([01:52:12](#)):

We love to do another one.

Speaker 2 ([01:52:14](#)):

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