



TRANSFORMING PEOPLE

FROM THE Paddock TO THE BOARDROOM

The unique technique of using horses to teach leadership and emotional intelligence, is a catalyst that allows people to take charge of their lives, to find their purpose, and to draw upon their own gifts and talents, to become their authentic selves.

How does an authentic leader show up? Do they rely on their title? If not, what do they rely on to move the feet of their herd? In the wild, leadership is earned, while in the corporate world it is bestowed. But to really succeed – in the corporate world as well as in the wild – one has to earn the respect of one’s subordinates to get them to work for you.

I believe that one can learn this powerful skill of earning respect from the paddock. Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) is regarded as a new leadership field in which experimental activities with horses reflect the realities of life. Participants learn about themselves and how to process behaviour, feelings and patterns. This helps to cultivate leadership skills, develop problem- and conflict resolution, establish boundaries and remain within them, deal with aggression and improve non-verbal communication.

BACK TO BASICS

Leadership has been defined in numerous ways, but ultimately it boils down to its most basic definition - getting work done through people. That sounds easy enough, right?

Well, anyone who has ever tried to motivate people into action knows the difficulties that arise when working with human beings. Leading people requires many skills. Daniel Goleman, in his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, provides supporting data that successful leaders possess competencies based on five elements in relationships:

- ⇒ Self-awareness
- ⇒ Motivation
- ⇒ Self-regulation
- ⇒ Empathy
- ⇒ Adeptness

Horses possess many of the competencies described by Goleman. Their



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awareness is so acute that they tune into all the non-verbal communication, including the emotions of the humans they interact with.

HORSES – THE PERFECT CO-FACILITATORS IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Horses by nature live the values that many organisations strive for – values which many leaders try with great difficulty to instill in the hearts and minds of their teams. Horses don't lie and you cannot lie to them. The old adage "straight from the horse's mouth" applies in this process.

In the wild, horses were preyed upon for food by wild dogs, big cats and primitive man. Their survival depended on their ability to be fully in tune with their surroundings – very perceptive and fast in reaction time. Like humans they utilise all of their senses – sight, smell, hearing, feeling and taste – to take in their surroundings. However, horses' senses are more acute. Their smell is similar to that of a dog. They can smell fear or anger in humans, and when smelling the ground they can identify who has passed by.

When interacting with people, the horses' acute awareness allows them to recognise the slightest uneasiness or tension in our

bodies, as well as the non-verbal messages. Their keen perception allows them to notice incongruence between our actions and our emotions. They are that perceptive! Not only do they notice the disconnections, they reflect them back to us through their behaviours.

The horses' unique sense of awareness and their ability to reflect the emotions of humans make them the perfect co-facilitator in leadership development training. They help people to learn how others perceive them and how their actions are being interpreted.

LESS THREATENING LEARNING

Learning via horses is less threatening, because it is a more personal experience and feedback is direct from the horse's mouth. Accomplishing a task involving a horse provides a wonderful metaphor when dealing with intimidating situations either inside or outside the workplace.

Horses are large and powerful animals – they provide a natural opportunity to overcome fear and develop self-confidence.

GREAT TEACHERS ABOUT LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Linda Kohanov, an expert in equine facilitated

psychotherapy, elaborates in her book, *The Tao of Equus*, on the relationship between emotional intelligence and the benefits of working with horses. She puts into words what those working with horses have known for years – that horses are great teachers about life and relationships. Working with horses offers the unique experience of developing a deeper understanding of yourself and how others perceive you, what motivates you, your adaptability and flexibility in changing situations, your innovativeness, level of commitment and initiative and ultimately your ability to understand and lead others.

BEST LESSON

The best lessons learned from horses are those that allow us to adapt our behaviour to be more balanced and co-operative. Horses teach us to be conscious leaders! To truly lead others you must first understand yourself and recognise your areas of strengths and areas for development.

DISCONNECTIONS SHOW

When we mask our emotions we hold tension in our bodies. Our horse partners recognise these disconnections and mirror it back through their actions. Emotions and tensions that lay under the surface and out of our human awareness are very visible to the horse. They notice the

inconsistencies in our actions and non-verbal messages. Status does not impress them.

WHAT MAKES THIS APPROACH DIFFERENT?

Learning takes place on the spot. The impact and learning are more powerful than the traditional methods of classroom training. Participants are taken out of their comfort zones and are so much more open to the process of self-discovery. They are more willing to accept feedback from a horse than from another human being.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Yolanda Sing is the founder and owner of Chloe Consultants, a company that uses equine-assisted learning techniques. Sing is professional coach, equine facilitator and author of the book 'Power In The Paddock'. She holds four degrees, specialising in People Development, Business Administration, Leadership Development and Psychology. She has spent time in Spain, USA, and Europe to qualify herself as an Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator. Her technique of using horses to teach leadership and emotional intelligence has won the 'UK HR Award for the Best in Learning and Development'.