

STRAIGHT FROM THE *Horse's Mouth* The Equine Leadership Programme

Being a manager is not an easy job, and often those in high powered positions need a little help in honing their skills. Few, however, would probably have thought prior to completing The Equine Leadership Programme that their best teacher may in fact be a horse.

It is a summer's day in Durban. It's hot and humid. A light breeze occasionally plays over the stable buildings at Hammarsdale outside the city, but mostly the sun beats down on the 20 people sitting on a circle of hay bales. Sweat trickles down their faces under their sun hats, their hair is plastered to their heads, and their clothes are creased and dusty.

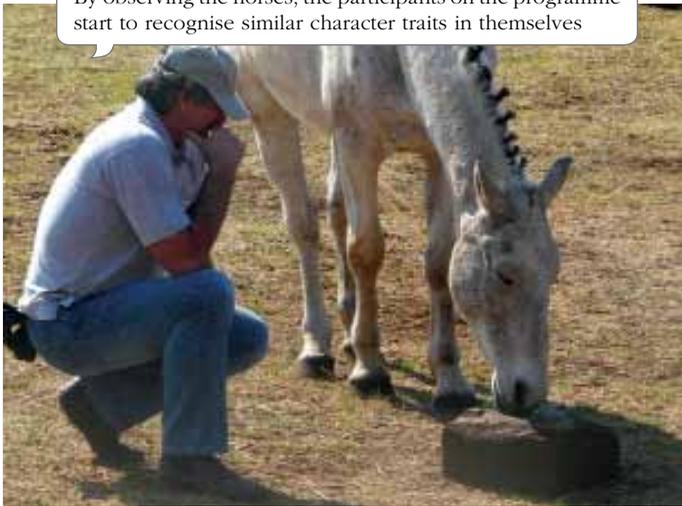
But not one of the seven women and 13 men seem to mind the heat, or even notice it. Instead, their attention is focused intently on the petite dark woman standing in their midst, speaking in a soft, but compelling voice. She is not on her own; with her in the paddock are five horses of various colours and sizes. There is the huge, dark stallion; the shy, pretty palomino; the gawky and thin piebald; the plump chestnut pony; and the skittish skewbald.

"See how the dominant mare is showing off," the woman says in a musical Afrikaans accent. "She knows

Yolanda Sing's Equine Leadership Programme encourages people to embrace their own shortcomings and to become more self aware by interacting with horses



By observing the horses, the participants on the programme start to recognise similar character traits in themselves



she's in charge, and she's letting us know it as well. Watch her and see how she uses her authority."

As the 20 people watch intently, sometimes even getting up and walking closer to stand between the horses, the patterns of interaction between the animals start to emerge. The task that the audience has been given is to observe the horses closely to see what kind of behaviour they recognise in themselves.

"That's how we start our courses," says Yolanda Sing, life coach and founder of the Equine Leadership Programme. "The first thing we do, is get people to observe the horses while we discuss leadership and herd dynamics. We ask them: 'Which one are you?' For two days we are with these animals, in sun or rain or wind, out of our human comfort zone. This is a subtle lesson that life must make us resilient and we must put up with discomfort in order to learn. We don't ride horses on this programme. We spend time with them, grooming them, watching them, and interacting with them; sometimes in a group and sometimes with just one person and one horse. And then the magic happens."

Yolanda is convinced that horses are the most intuitive of animals, and that interacting with them teaches us about ourselves.

"People get very emotional," she says. "In a very short time the horse has made a clear connection with them. I don't know how it happens or why, I have given up trying to explain it. All I know is that when people spend time with horses under my guidance, this interaction gives them insights into themselves and their abilities in a very short time and this becomes a life changing experience."

Yolanda believes that she has a gift of insight and intuition herself which allows her to understand the process between horse and human. This ability, along with her training in psychology and human resources, as well as her global experience in 15 different countries, allows her to relate this process of self discovery to the workplace.

"I can interpret the interaction," she says, "and relate it to the corporate environment. So these leadership programmes are valuable for companies, where people form their own 'herd'. With our lifestyles, people lose the ability to be self aware, to recognise their own shortcomings. Only when they acknowledge their own fallibilities can

they overcome them. I also sometimes run the programme for families that are having problems with communication. God has blessed me with this ability to help people, and I can look back on my life and say: 'I have done some good.'"

Yolanda's own journey started with a "horse whispering" course in Spain in 2002, where her interaction with the horses changed her life and made her realise she had a talent and a passion for helping people connect with themselves. Shortly after returning to her home in the Eastern Cape, she decided to abandon the high powered multi-national corporate world and concentrate on a life skills career with a more human – and equine – slant.

"There are examples of equine assisted therapy all over the world," she says. "It has been shown to help drug addicts and people with personality disorders. Even autistic people have been proven to relate better to human beings after working with horses."

For Yolanda, the most astonishing aspect of the courses is how fast and how completely people make connections with the horses and begin the process of self awareness.

"There have been people who arrive with resistance to the programme. Perhaps they are afraid of horses, but within minutes the magic starts to work. Horses have a presence and energy, a wisdom and honesty that is impossible to resist. It's very easy for people to get too busy with their lives, and they never stop to ask: 'Who am I? What do I stand for?' Then they look into the gentle eyes of a horse, time slows down and the answers come." 

Yolanda Sing is based in Maclear in the Eastern Cape, where she runs courses on her farm combined with fishing, hiking and sightseeing holidays. She also runs courses in conjunction with stables in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and the UK. For more information, contact +27 71 268 6377, email chloeinsa@gmail.com or visit www.chloeinsa.co.za.
